

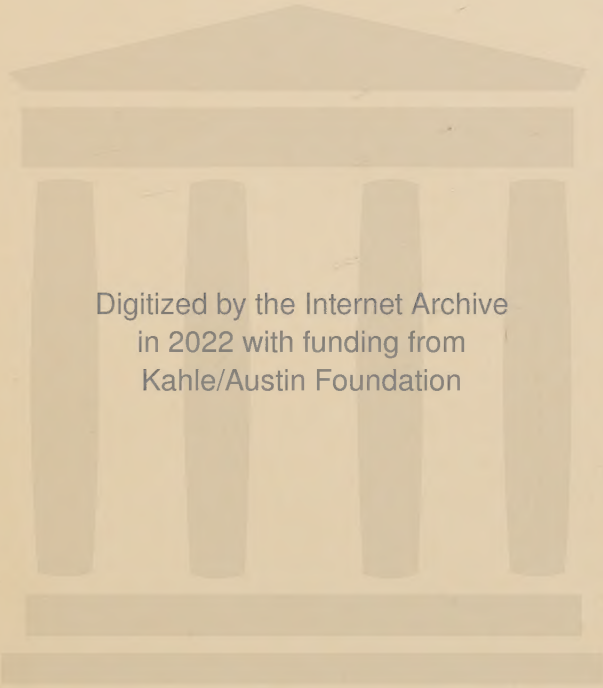
AN AFFAIR  
OF DISHONOR











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# AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOR

BY

WILLIAM DE MORGAN

AUTHOR OF "JOSEPH VANCE," "ALICE-FOR-SHORT,"  
ETC.



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# AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOR

## CHAPTER I

FIVE o'clock by the sundial on the lawn, and the man that had to fight the duel at seven was sound asleep and dreaming. He was dreaming about a place that must have been in existence, of course, when he was a boy, or how could it be there now? And there it was, sure enough, with the great marble fountain in the centre, and the yew-hedges clipped into the form of dancers all round. And there in the fountain-basin were the huge fish that must have been there then, human heads and all. And the six globes of solid gold on each angle of the hexagon parapet that skirted it and held the water in. None of these things had ever been brought to the Hall in his time—he was sure of it.

Then of a sudden it dawned upon him that this strange place was only Pan's Garden, familiar to his boyhood. But there was no such fountain in those days. That was all new. Nothing was there then but a shallow stone basin where the paths crossed, with a foursquare parapet just above the ground, a mere lip-rim of acanthus-leaf, with a bare relic of the God in the centre, washed for ever by the water-trickle that still kept a memory of the purpose of its youth. But how came he never to have noticed this new fountain? That was the oddity of it. He did not trouble about the human heads on the fish.



It was not as if the Box Walk, so called, that led to it was one that he had shunned in those days. On the contrary, the fact that he and his brothers were forbidden to play there, in order that the box-hedges it took its name from should flourish unspoiled, had always served as a stimulus to close investigation whenever guardian eyes could be evaded. He could recognise every lane and alley, every slightest feature, of the rose-garden it bisected as he walked along it but now. And then to find in the very middle of it, where he could remember nothing but the moss-grown masonry, with its trace of Pan, a change like this!

If he were to see any of his people about, how could he ask them to explain it? How was he to confess his ignorance—he, the owner of Croxley Hall for twenty years, whose forbears had owned it for nigh two-hundred? How could he say to old Nicholas, if he were to see him now: “Speak up, you old dotard, and tell me who placed this fountain here—I or my father.”

If he were to see anyone about who did not know him, then he might ask. There was a veiled lady walking towards him from a very great distance off—walking with a limp slowly, slowly—as soon as she could reach him he could ask her. He knew no lady at Croxley who walked with a limp. His mother limped, certainly; but then she died when he was just of age, eighteen years ago. The lady with the limp came on very slowly.

Quite suddenly she reached him, and her voice was his mother’s. It sounded stifled, behind the veil, but it was his mother’s.

“Dumb son—dumb son! Try to speak—try to speak! Oliver—Oliver!”

And then Sir Oliver tried to find his voice, but his

teeth jammed close, and no word would come. A frightful nightmare horror was upon him, and he felt powerless. But he raised one hand with a great effort, and caught at the veil before him. He pulled it aside, and saw no face; but a sort of woodwork of intersecting splints; that could cause, as it fell suddenly to pieces, a jerking laugh.

And then the man that had to fight the duel at seven was awake, cold sweat upon his brow; but from his dream, not from the knowledge in his mind of what manner of day was to come. And then a belated clock struck five: it was close enough, though, on the heels of the sundial.

He left blind and shutter untouched as he slipped secretly away to find the clothes he left overnight in another room. If the woman awoke it would spoil all.

He stole down the broad staircase, shrinking from the ground beneath at every creak; glancing round and backward, round and backward, none the easier in his mind that risk grew less at every step; too full of manly confidence in victory, of faith in the powers of his own sword-arm, to cherish stealthy longings for detection. Small fear of a mishap with that opponent, even if his own cause had not been so bad as to make the Devil's friendship sure: there was that Providence at least that he could trust in.

Across the dry firm foothold of the dewless turf, and through into the covert. The mid-June sun had given its earliest message to the daisies long since, but no cloud had come between them yet. The thrushes on the lawn were disappointed at the weather, as they knew the worms would stay below. Was it true, Sir Oliver found it in him to wonder, that the thrush can hear the sound



of the worm underground, and knows from it where to watch for an unsuspecting head? The sound of the mole, too, he knows, and can imitate; and uses his skill to quicken the worm's pace. So Sir Oliver's mother had told him long ago . . . Ugh!—that intolerable dream! The very recollection of it made the cold sweat start from his brow.

Three horses and two men were silent in the shadow of the copper-beeches—three horses who knew nothing of the work on hand; two men who knew, and were to know more soon. One, Sir Oliver's second, a tried old friend, a good fellow, one who flinched from no debauchery and profligacy that might add a lustre of achievement to the career of a man of fashion of the days of the Restoration; a man of wit and wits—who needed them, indeed, for lack of much else to live upon. The other a tried old groom, a bad fellow like his father before him, but like him, too, with one redeeming virtue—an equivalent one, perhaps—of unchangeable devotion to the Raydons of Croxley Thorpe.

A seven-mile ride to the tryst, half-way to her father's house—for it is her father he is to cross swords with; not husband, lover, brother, merely her father, half as old again as his opponent. That is what makes Sir Oliver so confident, makes his foot spring so lightly to the stirrup, makes him exult in his saddle on the turf. For they choose the grass-land, to be noiseless, and pass by the Mausoleum in the Park.

Croxley Park is no poor enclosure in a three-mile ring-fence. You may ride through a clear two miles of scattered oak and beechen covert before you find the Mausoleum in its central solitude. When you do, you may wonder at its horrible ugliness of form, but you will

forgive it for its colour and its lichens. Its architect was surely guilty of a crime against the stone his handiwork kept out of a place in some beautiful building. But it is patient, and will wait for admiration, which will come in the course of the ages that are needed to brew an Antiquity.

“Good for the Day of Judgment, Raydon!”

“Better than the Judgment itself, for some of them.” And then they both laughed, and said never a word more.

But it cheered them up, and made them feel manly, to show that they dared to blaspheme a little. Because, remember!—light speech about the Day of Judgment, that seems a small matter to us, supplied good impiety for men of that time, who had had a Creed flogged into them at a public school.

Sir Oliver credited damnation to some of his ancestors; for though they were permitted to sleep under that stone until their resurrection, were there not among them taints of forbidden heresies—errors of doctrine, that would be much more likely to procure it for them than plain sins, murder, or cruelty, tyranny to the weak or treachery to the unsuspecting—far, far more than gentlemanly vices that even their victims would forget sometime? But he rode faster than before to pass the Mausoleum, for his mother was there—she herself, asleep in a leaden coffin—and Sir Oliver had misgivings what she would think, if she were to awake, about the errand that carried him so near her.

That brought him back his nightmare dream again, with the gibberish the dream-thing that neither was nor was not his mother had used, and left him as a legacy. The words seized on the rhythm of his horse's hoofs on

the turf and beat monotonously with them. He could not escape them now. He could only quicken his pace to get it over. And then Colonel Mainwaring would have it they must not ride hard: a little exercise was well enough, but the duellist should come fresh to his work. This was not to be a bloodless duel—an encounter to be averted by a word of contrition, or arrested by a formal satisfaction to offended Honour. It was a fixture for a Murder—there in the summer woodlands, and all the blue of Heaven athrill with the music of the lark. A fixture for a Murder, with a doubt of which of two men should play the corpse.

The more reason, so, for scanty speech; the fewer words the better! The ground was chosen yesterday by the seconds: in yonder copse, fifty yards away, a farmer's cart is ready by their appointment to bear away what cannot walk or sit a horse—what may never do either again. Delay is only risk of interruption, and the two swords are of a length. Strip the men to their shirts, and to it at once!

A village boy, a youngster of eleven, had been shrewd enough to see that this cart, starting in the early morning furtively, must portend something to be seen, something of interest and excitement. Else why should a gentleman he knew to be no farmer accompany it—the village surgeon who had bound up a cut hand for him and stopped the blood? He had followed on, boy-like, always wondering the more as the cart went farther; had hidden awhile that two horsemen should pass him by; had seen them overtake the cart, and now slipped up to the scene of action undetected. But he is young, and cannot bear intent to kill. The swift glitter of the crossed swords is a terror to him, and he stops his ears that he may not hear

their slicing ring and sharp metallic click. For all that, he is held spell-bound; and must see it through, now.

He is young, but he can see and understand—enough, at any rate, to see that the older man is keen to kill, if he may. Keener than the younger and shorter man, who seems to this boy to hold his opponent in play, keeping well behind his own strong guard. A glorious art, thinks the boy through his terror, that can make of a mere quick-moving point an impassable steel wall. And he watches, still spell-bound, and is aware that the older man, warmer and warmer to his work, is taxing the swordsmanship of his opponent, albeit he himself is the lesser swordsman.

The ringing of the swords quickens, strengthens. A strong rally and a swift! . . . What is that?

The sword-point of the older man, struck upward from a well-delivered thrust, has reached his opponent's forehead, glancing off. Both seconds have interposed. Blood is streaming across his eye from the cut, and he wipes it impatiently away.

"It is nothing—a bare scratch!" he says. But the sight of the blood has broken the spell the boy was under, and he goes sick, and runs, hesitating now and again, and half-turning back. Then presently the swords begin anew, and he is half-sorry for himself, not to be there to see. . . . Yes, he will have a man's courage, and go back, come of it what may!

The seconds had looked at one another as the two principals held back with dropped points, Sir Oliver still brushing away the blood-drops as they came.

"I tell you, it is a scratch," he repeated. "Give me a handkerchief." He wound one, handed to him by his second, round his head. It served to stop the blood from

reaching his eye, and left his sight clear. Then the other second said to Colonel Mainwaring: "Do we proceed? How is that?" And then, as they spoke together aside: "We have the technical right to stop this, I believe."

"It is at least a moot point," said Colonel Mainwaring.

"Listen to me, Mainwaring," said the other. "If the quarrel were some slight word spoken at cards or dice—or about some gay wench upon the town—I should say that Honour was satisfied, but . . ."

"But in the matter of a man's daughter, you would say, of course it is different. That is so. But there is no wish to withdraw, on my side. Nevertheless, if Mr. Mauleverer is satisfied, I have no doubt Sir Oliver will be content."

"Can we not stop it of our own right? It is a bad business." The speaker left the impression that his own co-operation was against his will.

"Your man is the challenger," said Mainwaring. "If he is satisfied . . ." He paused, and walked over to his principal, who was awaiting, with his sword-point dropped, the result of the colloquy. So was his opponent, whom his second approached, and spoke with in an undertone.

"This quarrel is none of my provocation, Mainwaring, and you know it. This man's daughter is her own mistress—a free agent. She has suffered no wrong at my hands. If Mr. Mauleverer is *satisfied*, need I say I am?" Did Sir Oliver mean the other to overhear his words—to attach an exasperating meaning to them? If not, why that raised voice and mocking manner?

Mauleverer's second had urged him to accept what had passed, as amends for the wrong done him. He had wavered, was wavering, before the earnest pleadings of

his friend, when the tone of Sir Oliver reached him, if not his actual words. Then he spoke in a quick undertone to his second, who again approached Colonel Mainwaring.

“Mr. Mauleverer will consent to press this matter no farther now, in consideration of Sir Oliver Raydon’s temporary disablement. But Sir Oliver will no doubt be ready to meet Mr. Mauleverer again as soon as it is removed.”

Colonel Mainwaring appeared to consider for a moment, seeming to refer to the many rings on his left hand for enlightenment; then looked up and said curtly: “I need not consult Sir Oliver. I can answer for it that he will not avail himself of Mr. Mauleverer’s indulgence.”

And almost before the signal was given the swords had crossed once more, and the encounter was renewed. But this time on other lines. Whatever slight remorse of conscience had made the younger combatant hang back, possibly with a wish to steer clear of killing the man he had wronged, whose hospitality he had most villainously abused—for you can guess the story of it—that was a remorse so unstable that it could not overlive the pain of a sword-scratch on the forehead. And all the evil of a wicked heart was in the half-grin and the blood-smeared eye and the set jaw of Sir Oliver as he turned again to his work in earnest.

But not to triumph at once. Not till the fifteen or twenty years there is between him and his opponent begins to tell in his favour. Then, as he becomes aware that the sword that opposes him is fainter in its resolution, that the breath comes shorter and shorter still of the man who wields it, the growing fierceness of his own attack follows him remorselessly as he falls back, and ends the long encounter with a thrust.



He who receives it is wounded to death. The surgeon who is waiting with the cart can do nothing—no surgeon can—to stop the blood that is welling out inside the shirt he cuts with scissors to detach it. All the lint the world can supply would be useless there. But on no account move or raise him yet.

He is trying to speak, and his second kneels beside him, puts his ear down to catch the faint words. "He asks to speak to Sir Oliver Raydon," is the report. His murderer then kneels, and the words he stoops down to hear are: "Oliver Raydon, I leave you to God and your conscience."

Then the father of the woman who is sleeping through it all is dead; and the dead face tells the bystanders that this man was older than they thought him. For the serenity of his strength and confidence, and the flush of strong health, had made him seem no unfit opponent for his slayer. What will the woman say?

What tale can be told to the woman? Which of the three who can tell it will be the teller? The sound of their horses on the turf dies soon, and now nothing is left but to carry the dead man home.

Then the surgeon says to the second, under his breath: "He was wounded twice. I can answer it."

"Can you say what time apart the wounds were?" is the reply.

"Not over close together. The first would have bled slow, but there was much blood from it. He fought after he was wounded."

"Make me sure of that." Both examine the body again; and presently, all being ready, the cart departs, with its burden, and the two horses follow some little way behind, one ridden, one riderless. Then the song of



the lark and the cuckoo's note come back into the stillness, and there is no other sound? . . . Yes!—there in the bushes the voice of a boy crying bitterly for the horror of what he has seen, not daring to go home for knowledge of the thing that he must tell, or live concealing.

## CHAPTER II

SIR OLIVER's horse shied at the Mausoleum, coming back, and he beat the animal furiously—called it an accursed brute. This was because his own heart shied at it—flinched from it—had suggested to him that he should propose another road back. But his doing so would have involved an admission that he wished to avoid the Mausoleum. He had no reason for wishing to do so—not he!

That being so, why was he glad to get past it? He denied this gladness, to himself, as soon as it was safe behind him. But what set him on denying it? Why formulate belief or disbelief except at the bidding of doubt or fear?

When he had got well past the Mausoleum his mind changed, and he began to feel forgiving towards his own mental discomfort about it. Did not this discomfort, an absurd consequence of a dream-hallucination, show how free he was from another and a worse one? He was already on the watch against Guilt—already brewing prophylactics against pangs of Conscience. And he was convinced his Conscience must be at rest when an unreality like that could supersede it. There, there!—*he* was safely entrenched: who could doubt it? Had he never killed a man before, that he should fret about anticipated remorse before it came?

The stable-yard they rode the horses into, to minimise publicity, was walled towards the garden. Over beyond

that grey stone roll that crested its coping was the place of the dream-fountain—the place where no fountain was or had been. Sir Oliver, on the watch for a serpent's tooth in the vitals of his soul, caught himself again being glad at heart that an idiotic dream should have power to monopolize it. Little need to fear the days to come, if his work of this morning could give place to a thing like that!

He was at great cost to prove to himself that he was not beginning to be sick at heart.

“No—no; no warm water! Fill the pail at the pump. You are a cursed fool, Rackham! Who wants the tale-pyets in the kitchen to know . . . ? Where's the warm water to come from?—answer me that!” Rackham the groom had seen thus far, that his master would not care to take his blood-patched forehead into the house unwashed, but not far enough to be beforehand with a reason why he should ask the housekeeper for warm water. He provided the pail, and stood by immovably while Colonel Mainwaring carefully detached the clotted handkerchief and helped Sir Oliver in his washing.

Mr. Rackham did all things immovably. The immobility of his close-shaved jaw gave a keynote to the conduct of his life, and sanctioned the presence of a reptile's eyes in a human head, from the Devil's point of view. These eyes were much of a colour with the greyest of the beard-crop's cleaned-off soil, and made his head a monochrome throughout, or very near it. But they had just expression enough in them to say, “Say nothing!” to an observant stable-boy who led away the horses with him, each leading one, and leaving Colonel Mainwaring's—expression enough, too, to make Sir Oliver feel he could entrust his sword to him, with his murder fresh on it, to

smuggle away out of Lucinda's sight. It would not do to carry it indoors now. And yet, in days like these, few would have ridden out unarmed.

The two men left alone spoke together, little above a whisper—Sir Oliver morosely, his friend equably. He had done his duty as a friend, you see, and now the time was near for him to wash off the blood from his memory, as he was already cleaning away the finger-taint in a fresh pail of water. The slight wound had stopped bleeding—showed for little.

"*She* must be told, I suppose," Sir Oliver muttered grudgingly.

"How can it be kept from her?" The speaker's voice said plainly: "I have done *my* part now. *That* is *your* affair."

But the murderer had no stomach for speech with his victim's daughter. Could he not devolve that work on his friend? His view of the obligations of friendship were those we hold, all of us, when we stand to win by a liberal interpretation of them.

"Look at this, Mainwaring! This Lucinda has to be told—it cannot be avoided. Think how much more easily you can tell her than I!"

"Warily ho, Sir Oliver! Where do you find it part of your second's duty to go to confession on your behalf? Put a good face on it, man! Speak for yourself."

"Mainwaring!—I thought *you* a better friend than that. What would *you* have me say to her?—think of it!"

"Faith!—I know nothing of what may be to be said, in a like plight. All I know is, it's *none* of mine to say it. The girl is no mistress of mine. Tell her yourself.

You have made your bed—you may even lie on it. Fare you well, and good luck!”

“No, Mainwaring, stop! What *can* I say to her? . . . Tell her the truth!—yes, but *how*? It’s a harder task than you think.”

“Wrong again, Sir Oliver Raydon! I count it about as hard a task as a man meets in a lifetime. But the quarrel was your quarrel; none of mine. And the girl is your girl; none of mine. And the sword is none of mine that made such a brisk end of the matter but now. I have seen you through to the edge of my undertaking. And in truth—listen to me, Raydon!—I should make a sorry business at the best of this telling of a tale in the teeth of its welcome. Get you to it, and get you through it, the best you may. Say your worst of the old dog’s obstinacy. I couldn’t but admire him, too. It may be you will absolve yourself better than I could do it for you.”

“You cannot blame me!” Sir Oliver’s speech had a touch of resentment, or at least of suspicion of something he might resent.

“Blame you? Not I, man! How should I blame you? Every man has a right to his chances in love, and every woman knows her own pleasure best. This girl of yours must answer her share of the blame. But the old fellow was in the right of it—an old game-cock! He could but eat the meal you and his daughter dished up for him. We’ll drink to his memory when this has blown over. Tell her the best you may; and then get away somewhere abroad, and keep away till old Ralph’s forgotten. Take her with you—that’s my advice. Farewell!”

Sir Oliver said nothing in reply. He waited in sullen

silence till the sound of the horses' hoofs died in the distance, then gathered his hat and gloves and whip from where he had laid them while washing. The immovable groom came back, obsequious. His master handed him the gloves and whip, and asked, as he stood stroking a gentle finger over his cut forehead, "Is that door open?" It was a door that would have led through to the dream-fountain, had he still been dreaming. If only it could be there, and reaffirm the dream-world! No harm in walking through to see.

The door was locked, but the key hung near by. It had been kept locked, Mr. Rackham testified, since her late ladyship—Sir Oliver's mother—had ordered it, so that no one should pass between the garden and the stables. But it had been kept oiled, not to spoil with the damp. Sir Oliver had forgotten the existence of this door: was there a faint hope in that, that he was still dreaming? But when the groom opened it, with a bit of a strain on the key, there was no fountain in sight. Sir Oliver passed through into the garden, and the door closed behind him.

The June sun was getting well into stride in the heavens, and the roses were enjoying it. The heat was not overpowering yet, but meant to be, even if those great white clouds came to the rescue. But it was not the heat that parched his tongue, and made his lips restless, and his eyes burn, heavy in their sockets; nor was the throbbing in his head caused by that slight cut. The pain of that was a little thing apart, that he could separate and make light of. He tried to think that nightmare dream was answerable. Why, see how it clung about him, even now! Even now he could recall distinctly the human-headed fish, and on the most conspicuous one of all the



head of John Rackham the groom; quite one colour all over under water, eyes and all! And see how the mere meaningless jargon of the dream-image caught and clung about him, finding a shuddering application to some passing thing. It was going, he felt certain, to claim for itself the dumbness he knew he should feel, the padlock he knew would be on his tongue, should he try to speak to his woman-victim of her father's death. But it was the dream that would paralyse him, not the end of the sword-encounter to which he was not the challenger.

His manhood would come back to him in time; but his cowardice was on him now, with a vengeance. Else why continue this incessant reasoning with himself? Better stop it at once! Why beat about the bush to prove what everyone already knew? Death in duels must come about, now and again, unless duels should be abolished altogether—a thing inconceivable! And as for the provocation he had given—what foul play had he been guilty of? The girl was eighteen, and old enough to know better, as the phrase goes. How had his conduct been unlike that of any other man of fashion and spirit? Could not the wench keep her eyes to herself? . . .

Oh no!—she meant it, all along. Innocent—inexperienced girl indeed! Innocent parent, rather! Little knows Father Stay-at-home how much his country-lass may learn of Life in a couple of seasons of town! Besides, who could say his suit would not have been *en tout bien, tout honneur*, if it had not been for his wife—curse her!—? How could anyone—how could he himself know what his course would have been had an honourable one been open to him? At least—do him this but justice!—he had honourably promised this Lucinda



to make her his wife, if he could rid himself of his other encumbrance. He appealed to an imaginary court of Love and Honour with a confidence that his powers of imagination could keep it ignorant that he never meant this promise when he made it; and his confidence was misplaced, as it turned out. He had to avert summary justice—by repeating his pledge, and really meaning it, this time! He meant it, now; and could mean it with perfect safety, as he knew well that that other encumbrance would give him no chance to fling her off.

See now! A moment ago he resolved to put all this cowardice aside. And here it was back again! Patience, patience! It was all too recent for him to make an end of it yet awhile. But a time would come for forgetting. Was that Lucinda on the terrace—where his mother used to limp up and down in old days? . . . Oh, curse that dream! . . .

Never mind the dream—have done with it! . . .

Yes!—that was Lucinda. Lucinda in the lightest robe an anticipated hot day dictates—muslin or fine lawn at the heaviest. She was leaning on the stone balustrade skirting the steps from the upper terrace, disappointing with her fan the sun-glare that had found its way through a flowering arbutus to kiss her, gazing along the broad walk Sir Oliver had just passed over. A few minutes sooner, and she would have crossed his path. He was glad she had not. Anything was better than to meet her unprepared.

As she stood there watching for him, and he knew what her great black eyes would have looked like had he met her, what her soft hand would have felt like in his own, her soft lips upon his cheek, he said to himself that this girl was worthy to be loved, if ever woman was. He did

not add, "Worthy of the other sort of Love, as well as mine," because he knew nothing of that variety—only his own. Not an hour had he passed with her without taking in vain the sacred name of Love—a Divinity whose groves had no path for such as he, whose shrine he had never seen. But the word on his lips had not chimed true with the sound in her ears. And yet neither knew it! Each kept a flavour for the word apart, and neither tasted from the other's dish. Do not peer into the unholy caverns of *his* mind—dwell in the garden of hers, wild and disorderly perhaps, but still a garden.

He wondered at himself that he should be so solicitous to delay speech with her, if only for a minute—for a second! He actually walked along the skirting turf of the flower-bed, to be noiseless, that those eyes should remain turned from him as long as possible. Yet to how little purpose! The time must come.

Her laugh rang musically loud in the morning air, when she turned and saw him. It came like a burst of rejoicing out of place in a plague-stricken city. But it forced a laugh from him that nearly choked him, as she came floating—or falling, as you choose—into his arms, and his embrace saved her a fall on the gravel.

"'O sweet Oliver!—O brave Oliver!—leave me not behind thee.' . . . Why so glum, Sir Oliver? 'Why so pale and wan, fond lover?' " . . . But she stopped short in her reminiscences from Shakespeare and Suckling as she saw the forehead-cut. For she had raised as she kissed him the hat he had slouched forward to hide it.

"Silly beauty! Just a scratch, skin-deep. A strip of surgeon's plaster, and all will be well." But he had to speak the lie he had arranged for it, in case his courage should fail him. "Your macaw did me that good turn,

half an hour since, in the greenhouse. I had some ado to get him clear of my head. . . . No, not his beak; his claw, as I dragged him off." And then he felt he had made matters worse. Almost better to have told a less clever lie, that she might have suspected, and pressed him to confession. So he who dares not draw his own tooth is almost glad of the dentist's pincers.

"The darling!—what had you done to provoke him? 'As if my precious bird—my dearest bird—would scratch except he was provoked! Stupid Sir Oliver!" But she kissed him again on what had been the grin of his resolve to slay her father, scarce two hours ago. O the torture of living, in the face of her ignorance of it all!

But he was in for a term of lying pretexts now, and he would have done better to have said at once, "I am your father's murderer; but it is by no fault of mine that his blood is on my head."

He could have thrown himself on her mercy, to take pity on his remorse, and share it. He tried to speak, even now, to put an end to the gaiety of her utter ignorance, that was harder to him to bear than the worst reproach. And even harder than that, the tender solicitude for his injured brow. How could he repulse her mock-imperious command to him to come under the hands of the surgeon; her gentle, and indeed dexterous, handling of the slight wound he could easily have ignored; her mock censure of his molestation of her darling bird—how without self-betrayal? He had no heart to feign a light, jesting mood to answer hers. His safest course would be to let his best attempt towards a genial one pass for a churlishness just a shade beyond his morning's wont. For it was a common speech enough with her that his sulky lordship must needs break his fast before he could find a civil

word to speak. And last night more wine than usual had gone to nourish his moroseness of the day to come.

"Where did you ride so fast this morning, Oliver mine?" said she, as she attended to his wound. They had passed into the house, and were in the room that opened on the terrace, when she asked this question.

"How came you to know I rode at all?" She had had to wait for his answer, but he did not wait for hers. "By the Long Park to the Swan's Mead, along by King's Theydon and Russet Cross. There is hay to cut still in the Abbey meadows." This was true, of a sort. But had it not been for that ugly dream, he would have said: "Beyond the Mausoleum," not "By the Long Park."

Her answer came to his question, rather in the rear of the argument: "I felt you go, in my sleep, and was not of a mind to wake up to stop you. Then the tread of the horses on the turf beat into my dreams. Are you not hungry?"

"Hungry enough. A ride betimes whets the appetite. . . . Breakfast on the cedar-lawn? . . . Yes, that was well thought of." He had risen to his feet when she had finished placing the plaister on the cut, and, looking at himself in a mirror to see it, had caught also a reflection of the lawn beyond the terrace, and the servants laying a table beneath the trees. He had no appetite for breakfast, but he must affect one. It might be easier to eat than he fancied, when it came to trying.

Yes—food was not amiss after an effort or two. But he was farther than ever from daring to thrust the horror in his heart into the unsuspecting life of the girl; while she, for her part, guessing some disquiet in him, strove to allay it more and more with mirth and sweet speech.

Never had she been more charming: how she would have lasted! O that he had not been Cain, to enjoy this fair fruit that he had plucked! He cursed his petulance and want of self-discipline. Could he not have had the sense to see where prudence lay?—a slight wound for the nonce; or even a bad one and a long nursing, but never this inexorable, overmastering Death, that comes to all and comes to stay—that has his way with what was once a man. But he had tried—yes, he *had* tried—to disarm his opponent; yet the old fellow's sword-hand was too strong for that! Think of it, had he only had this much to tell, that a bout of sword-play had been fought on fair ground, and a swift turn of his point had left her father at his mercy—to be generously spared! His magnanimity, that would have been, quickened in his brain; gave him a moment's half-ease, and was dismissed, leaving him poorer than before, as he sickened at its falsehood.

Had he ridden in view of the Old Hall? She went back to her questioning, after he and she had eaten, there on the lawn below the cedar-trees. The Old Hall was her father's house, his birthplace and hers. Only a year ago she was little more than a schoolgirl there; knowing nothing, all the world before her. What was she now?—answer that! What a knowledge had come to be hers, in that short twelvemonth!

“I was dreaming of them all, last night, Oliver mine!—all the living and the dead mixed together; just dream stuff! There was my sister you never saw—Amy. She was Aminta, you know, but she would be vexed at heart if one should call her Minty—she never could abide the name. So she was Amy to all of us. O but she was beautiful! If you had seen her, Oliver, you would never have had a thought for me.” She was on the grass at his



feet—it was green under that cedar-tree, not its fellow—and the growing heat made her use her fan. He was smoking the tobacco that was getting so common now; grown in Virginia, where her brother was. His pipe was just a little pear-shaped bowl all but in a line with its stem. And it held but a thimbleful; but this was right, for the weed was still costly. She flicked away the smoke with her fan, as it floated towards her.

“Never a thought for Lucinda—never a thought for the Queen of Love! A rare rival in truth! But my Lucinda’s praise of her sister’s beauty is but faint at the best. What are the bluest eyes that ever shone, to match Lucinda’s? How shall a golden head compare with locks like these?” His speech dragged; there was no enthusiasm in it. The girl would often have exchanged high-flown compliments for words of Love—of the sort of Love *she* had to give, a better sort than his. But this morning surely she found it rather harder than she had ever yet confessed it to herself to be, to shut her eyes to an assumption that hurt her, that assurance of her beauty was the prize her life aimed at, rather than a nestling-place in another’s heart. The truth was the reverse of what she thought:—never had he gone so near loving her as to-day. It was sheer mechanical stress of some padlock on his voice that told on his effort to speak, and made an ill sound for it in his own ears. But whatever misgivings it gave her, she hid it well. Her laugh rang out; and the macaw, in his house beyond the lawn, heard it and shrieked in answer.

“But you never saw her, Oliver mine, you never saw her. Even the bird is laughing at you, sweetheart! Leave your silly tropes, and answer my question:—How near did you ride to the Old Hall?”

“No nearer than to see naught of it; and yet, as near as my liking carried me. A man would have the eyes of a windhover to see the Old Hall from Russet Cross, let alone that he would have to see through the Hanger Hill and Lea Down. Where is thy memory, lass?”

“Oh, but my memory’s good, Oliver mine, for all the way ’twixt this and my father’s home. Should I forget, think you? Why, I can see it all now, and never move from where I sit! On beyond the Abbey Meadows, just a mile, and there is Ashen Mow and Blean Carn, and then the long road through the wood to Lea Down. And the Old Hall, and the dear old father there among his guests.” . . . She paused, warned by a sob, climbing in her throat, of the danger of going on. Sir Oliver would be impatient with her if she cried. But she had only just swallowed that sob in time. After all, where would she be if this man tired of her? Where and what? But oh, what a base thought to think of him! To begin to doubt him thus soon, in the face of all his pledges!

And what about him, as he thought to himself—he had to!—that her father’s guests would look for their host in vain, would listen in vain for his welcome to the home he knew so well how to make theirs? What could he say to her now if, when he tried to open those dry hot lips, he found he could speak? He could not say now, as he had said twenty times before, “Go back home, Lucinda—the choice is open to you—go back home!” He could speak neither the thought in his mind, nor the speech that had served his turn once and again, before this. He tried to get his teeth apart for a yawning protest against serious talk so early in the morning, but failed. It would have in the end to come to a choice between silence and



the telling of what she *must* know later, somehow. For now, silence was best. He would not acknowledge that speech was impossible to him, but made believe that silence was his free choice.

She could not understand his sullenness; how should she? But she must cheer him up—bring a smile to his set face, somehow! What did he think was her dream about Amy? She had dreamed that Amy was married to the hangman, and had twins. He managed a stinted smile, and a hope that the twins were doing well, in the dream. But he hated the very name of a dream. There was hideous latitude, in dream-analogies, for Heaven knows what combinations and surprises.

“And what do you suppose Amy had called the twins?” Sir Oliver shook his head with a sickly smile. He feared an ambush of something unpleasant. “Mackerel and Murder!” laughed Lucinda, merry at the absurdity. But so sore was he that the mere name of a fish, chaotic and meaningless as was its context, gave him a shudder. Were there not fish in his own damnable nightmare of the morning?

His gloom grew, and she saw it. She must make an effort to penetrate it, or disperse it; no matter which. She moved closer to him, crept up quite close as he sat, his back against the tree-trunk. Her white arm went round his neck; surely there should have been more sense of a response in it—not a movement to her, she did not ask that—only another and less stony sort of stillness. Was he angry with her?

“Shall I tell you, Oliver mine, what I am half-minded to do? Yes, I will—yes, I will! I am half-minded to take my father at his word, and go to him this day—this very day. Did he not say come back and he would for-

give me, were my sin thrice as black? Did he not say he cared never a straw for the words of women who made believe to saint, each with a lover if the truth came out? Did he not say he would face them all down for me; and as for the men, them he knew how to deal with?" . . . Sir Oliver choked a little towards speech in his dry throat, but she ran on before he could command a word. "No—no, my dearest, my prize among men, my very life! I would not leave you, Oliver, though the returning of to-morrow's dawn hung upon it. My faith to you is thrice the pledge of a bonded faith; for, could I not break it and go scatheless? Who would not dare before Heaven to break the pledge he had backed with gold or land, knowing his loss would pay the cost?" . . . She paused a second as he tried to speak, but the question that had stopped her was little more than the word "*What . . . ?*" She caught his meaning, and saved him the completion of it.

"What should I say, should my father urge me to turn from my wickedness, and repent? I should say, 'A poor amend indeed for a sin sinned past all recall, to break my word to my love, and leave him to battle with his conscience alone!' And then I would ask him what thought would he have of *you*, dear love, if you forsook me to become a monk, and make good terms in time with Heaven? Yes!—I would say to him that I would expiate with you the wrong we have done Heaven together, not seek its favour by a breach of faith towards my love—my love I love better than Heaven or Earth. And I would make him say in the end that I was right, for all he would talk, as he surely would, of my perverted sense of Honour. Better, to my thought, to be true to a perverted sense of Honour of one's own fashioning than

to affect a loyalty one felt not to some wiseacre's law with no heart in it!"

Still, never a word from the man! Yet his having once or twice seemed to begin speech, and seemed to be interrupted in it, left a false sense of his having spoken. No impression was conveyed that he felt, as he truly did, quite dumb. How he wished now he had overleapt his barrier at once, not waited for his task to grow worse! Or why not have written her a letter, and left her to break the neck of grief alone? She was absolutely, to his thinking, in his power;—how could she choose but acquiesce in what had happened? It was perhaps the only spot in his soul where a seed of good could strike or grow, the one that felt a sort of pang at the idea of her hating her father's murderer; and the thought was pleasant to him that she could have no choice but to conceal that hatred:—if she did it thoroughly enough, that would do for him. It was his nearest approach to a redeeming feeling. Otherwise, he was morally on a par with the foulest human vermin that ever cursed God's earth. None the less that, moral coward as he was, he could be physically brave at a pinch; that is to say, as long as he felt secure of victory.

Even now, speechless as he was—hopeless as it seemed that he should ever get his tale told—he was longing at heart for the time when the first shock should be over, and he should be consoled by the sound of his own voice telling extenuating lies. How he would dwell on the exasperation of that slight cut, on his forbearance till he felt his own blood warm upon his forehead, and caught its scarlet in the eye it blinded! He framed his speech that was to tell the tragedy of the morning, but never dared to utter its first word. It would have been easier

for him if news had come to her that her father was slain in a duel, to say, "This is the hand that slew him," than to write the fact of his death on the blank sheet of an unsuspecting mind.

The girl, as she sat backward of a full view of the face her hand caressed, could not see its hard-set lines, its knitted brows, all the tension of it and the greyness. Her voice ran musically on, torturing him with its sweet cadences and disallowance of discarded cares. For some slightest insight—some gleam of something wrong—had shown her that her talk of her father had been misplaced. Maybe—who could tell?—it was too soon in the day to be dwelling on such matters. It was selfish of her. But *his* fault, too, partly. What need had he to talk of Russet Cross and Lea Down?

It chanced presently that a robin crossed the lawn, and came close to them, claiming breakfast. Lucinda went for crumbs to the table, and threw them on the lawn, watching the bird approach. A second robin, counting his privileges invaded, flew straight at the first comer, pecking at him furiously. "See, Oliver, see," said Lucinda, watching them, "how the little peckrels use their beaks, like little wicked swords in a duel. Oh, how can men find heart to slay each other? Oliver—Oliver!"

Then, as the first robin fled, leaving the other mighty proud of his victory, she turned and caught a look upon her lover's face. An awful look that she had never seen before. And a choking cry, that none hears until for the first time he sees epilepsy, was in her ears. She tried to catch him as he fell forward, for he had half risen. But his weight was too great for her, and she could not stay him from a headlong crash into the porcelain they had

drunk and eaten from. And there he lay in his convulsion, and foam flew from his lips as from a mad dog's mouth, and mixed with the blood that came freely from his bitten tongue, till the girl's heart stood still as she thought of the demoniacs in the tombs of old.

### CHAPTER III

SIR OLIVER's rally from his attack was a slow one. He did not know what had happened; could remember only that he thought himself called, and rose to go and seek the caller. Then that he must needs shout loud, against his will—even as compulsion comes on us in delirium, sometimes. And then consciousness, on the greensward, with summoned servants around, and Lucinda in her terrified beauty, and her dress soiled with the blood that had come from his mouth. Only this he did not know; but only that his mouth was sore, for some reason.

His hope of a couple of hours past, that he was in a dream, came back to him as his wits came back—slowly, yet quicker than he let them seem to come. For his memory of his tale to tell revived first of all else; and he was glad of an excuse for silence. Yet, to deceive himself, he affected in his own heart that his confession had been on his tongue's tip, at the point of his interruption by this God-knows-what that he could not understand.

“What is all this to-do? Why are all these fools here? Pack them all off about their business! No!—let Rackham stay.” And then, all the other servants having gone, he made the groom help him to his feet, and leaned on his arm as he walked towards the house. There was in this no such tax on his companion's strength that the woman's arm might not have served his turn as well; and it made a little soreness for her that her lover should not have looked to her first for help. As for him, he was



flinching from her more and more, as the ghastly story he had to tell grew deadlier and deadlier in its hold upon his heart.

"How came I to fall—why was it?" said he, as she followed him, fearing his displeasure, yet knowing no overt cause for it. He hardly turned to her to speak.

"Oliver dearest!—why *should* I know, and how? What can I say, but that you fell and lay insensible?"

"I was not insensible. How long was it?"

"I was in such fear for you, love!—how could I tell what it might be that ailed you? It might have been death."

"But at a guess, how long?"

"There go the clocks at the hour! What time was it, Mr. Rackham, when the boy rode away for the doctor?"

Mr. Rackham couldn't say to a minute. "But it was well short of the half-hour. The boy Kenneth himself could tell best." But his master cut his speech short.

"Who sent for the doctor? Where were your wits, Mistress Lucinda, not to stop the damned fool? What has it all been? Tell me that, and send the idiot packing when he comes—him and his blood-letting and his purges." . . .

"How shall we know what ailed you, if we send him packing? Be patient for the nonce, dearest Oliver. How can we be as wise about the malady as he?"

"I'll none of his damnable drugs—be sure of that! Nor be let a drop of blood—be sure of that too! Make him write the name of the ailment, if it be one, fairly on a sheet of paper and sign his name to it. And if he make words over it, souse him in the horse-pond till he be of a wiser mind."

Thereon the girl urged on him that no physician, were

he Galen himself, could name the disorder except he should see the patient. But Sir Oliver would hear none of this. There was nothing wrong with him now, as must be plain to her, or to anyone with eyes; and for his attack of faintness, or unconsciousness, surely she could describe that better than ever he could, who knew naught of it, nor felt aught either. Let her but tell Dr. Phinehas what chanced, saying it happened thus, and thus, and if his doctorship was not a mere quackery, he would be able to tell at a word what was the name of his malady. But none of his 'pothecary stuff for him, till he had drained the last cup of good wine from the cellar. Which brought them up the steps of the garden terrace to the window of the great hall which opened on it, and there Sir Oliver would have it the clock, which pointed to eleven, was wrong. And Mistress Lucinda said so it was, truly—thinking he meant it was some eight minutes behind the time. But he meant that it should have been ten by the hour; for he, being still somewhat stupefied, had failed to count the strokes of the clocks they had heard without. And he now saw, for the first time, that he had lain over an hour on the greensward, without sense or feeling.

They got him away to his room, at his own choice that it should be so; and there he lay down to sleep, seeming well pleased to be alone, at which his lady chafed not a little. For she would have been better satisfied that he should have besought her to remain with him, in place of indifference as to whether she stayed or went. And thereto his desire that John Rackham only should be near him for service, of all in the house. But she gave way to him in this, as in all else; for instance, his bidding her write straightway to stop the coming of all invited guests, on the plea of his indisposition.

And yet all the while he was saying that nothing ailed him. And in truth he thought so; and his zest to be alone, and sleep, was but the outcome of the stress of his secret burden of which Mistress Lucinda had no knowledge or suspicion. It had come to this, that he hungered only for a respite from the telling of the tale that he knew she must one day know. Also, it might be that his task would be an easier one if the knowledge of her father's death came to her first from without, whether or not he figured in it as his slayer.

So she, compliant in all things, however much she felt this wound or that, left him to himself, and sat alone, building up hopes that she might hear his voice summoning her to his side.

She wrote such notes as were needed to intercept the three or four men guests and the one or two women who would have accompanied them—women situated like herself, but her social inferiors—women whom she shrank from, whom she never would have spoken with but for her own reckless, misguided defiance of social rule. She was better pleased to write these notes to stop their coming than she had been to invite them. When she had arranged for their despatch by messenger, she was interrupted in the thought of what she should do next by a sudden fatigue that surprised her—a reaction from excitement, an anxiety no previous experience of hers had qualified her to foresee. She made a stand against it; answered her attendant, Rachel Anstiss, who would have had her lie down, with a reference to the heat of the day, and walked languidly about, fanning herself.

But she lay down presently, on the couch in the great hall that was cool still, for all the sun was so hot without, now near upon noonday. She had no heart for sleep;

although she might readily have slept, as far as fatigue went, however strange the hour might seem to choose for sleeping. But she was on the watch for Oliver's voice, should he call, and she longed for it too much to forget that it might come. She could listen to the hum of the strayed bee, cheated by an open window to believe in sweets within—could hear it rise and fall, now near, now far, and then at last detect the cheat, and sweep impatiently again into the blazing air without; vanish away, recur once more, then die away for good. She could even dwell upon the monotonous, decisive ticking of the eight-day clock, that would not hurry a single pace, although the great event of its day was so near at hand—even that, and yet not half drop an eyelid. For her eyes burned, and were dry, and her brows above them throbbed, and her heart was full of sickness and misgivings of she knew not what.

Could she have held back the time she would have done it. For she dreaded the midday meal, and the presence of all the servants, and the morose humour of her lord and master. For that was the name to call him by; and his mastery was stronger over her than any rule or rein the laws of God or man grant to husband or father for the better curbing of wife or child. But the hours passed on in the stillness, and the great clock would have its say at last. It muttered a solemn warning, denouncing all who did not pause to listen to the thing it had to tell; the thing that might be true to-morrow of another day, but never of this day again.

But Lucinda was impatient with it, that it should dwell so long and loud on what all knew already, when what she herself desired to know was who was the rider who had dismounted at the front gate, whose summons for ad-

mission would be heard in a moment—*was* heard before the last stroke was forgotten, the resonance extinct, each hand busy on its task apart. A timorous summons, as of a man who rings a great man's bell, and would conciliate him by keeping its voice down to the level of his necessities. A summons that says a meek man is at the gate, who may ring again, but not too soon.

"Rachel Anstiss, if that is Doctor Phinehas, see that they send him in here to me."

"Not if he asks for Sir Oliver—my lady?" The handmaiden addresses her grudgingly by this title—hangs fire over it, discharges it abruptly in the end. This is the way of the household, and Lucinda knows it—has known it since she came here first.

"Do as I have told you!" Rachel knows the time is not safe for rebellion yet. It may come, though, or not, as time shows, or policy decides. For now, she will make sure that the dot-and-go-one footstep of Dr. Phinehas goes straightway where she is bidden to show him.

A man of sixty may look like a skin of parchment stretched over knobs of wood. For Dr. Phinehas did so. He may have a polished pate, if he wear no peruke, and have no brows or lashes to his eyes, and his gold spectacles may seem to have been born with him; and yet there may be no need for him to crack his fingers as he speaks, nor to pinch his lips with superhuman shrewdness at speech-ends, nor to cover his ear that can hear with his hand, and bring both within an inch of your mouth. Yet Dr. Phinehas did all these things, and Lucinda disliked the last. But she had to shout into his ear for all that. Still she was grateful to him for one thing: he called her boldly by her name, and made no attempts to gloss over

her position by any use of *lady* or *ladyship*, to which last very surely she had no title.

"The worshipful Sir Oliver hath had a seizure, Mistress Lucy? . . . It is I that am asking *you*. Is that so?"

"A sudden malady of a sort, truly enough! But whether it be a seizure or what, I cannot know, as how should I?"

"Neither can I, Mistress Lucy, except I see him."

"What can I do, then, Dr. Phinehas, seeing he is resolved to see no physician, neither to take any remedy?"

"Nothing, indeed, Mistress Lucy! The obstinate man is resolute to his own destruction. But you were present—so said the messenger who summoned me—when this convulsion, whatever it might be, came about?" Dr. Phinehas interlaced his fingers, and forced them downwards and outwards with a sounding crack. He then brought his left hand suddenly back to its ear, to listen with, as before.

Lucinda shouted a loud affirmative "Yes!" into it, and then went straight on into a precise account of all that had occurred, beginning with a statement that Sir Oliver, on his return from a short ride before breakfast, had foolishly provoked her cockatoo to scratch his forehead. The doctor hearkened to her attentively, nodding at intervals as one who has just heard what some previous information had led his insight and experience to expect. When she had reached Sir Oliver's headlong fall on the lawn, the learned man embarked on a succession of rapid nods. He had heard enough, for one of his wide experience. Why listen further to what he could know without telling?

"Enough, Mistress Lucy! Now—your attention! Was



there any immoderate hæmorrhage from this parrot-scratch? . . . Did it bleed much?" This was to accommodate her lesser understanding.

"Scarcely at all!" The doctor left a confirmatory shrewd look on his face, to show he had anticipated this answer, with his head atwist to endorse it. But it did not convince Lucinda that he *had* expected it.

"Has the worshipful Sir Oliver suffered of late from effusion of any acrid humour?—from crudities of the stomach?—from melancholic depression of the mind?"

"I know of no such thing. He was merry overnight, and slept well, rising early to ride."

"Now listen! You tell me, Mistress Lucy, that the patient foamed at the mouth, as a mad dog foams. Tell me this—was this convulsion accompanied with a spastic rigidity of the whole body, or was it rather an irregular clonic contraction of the muscles locally?"

"Both, to the best of my noting the manner of it. But how can I know that I understand you? He jerked most horribly, and his eyes went away beneath the lids. And the blood came from his mouth. I could but think, as I heard his cry, that a fiend had entered into him, and that it was ill for me, in an evil day, that there should be no blessed Saviour to cast him out, as our Lord cast out the evil spirits of the Gadarenes and drove them for refuge to the bodies of the swine."

Dr. Phineas smiled compassionately at the simplicity that would mix together the belief that was a duty with the knowledge that was a certainty—a confusion of secular with religious truth. What should he know of the casting forth of evil spirits otherwise than by blood-letting and purges? "There is none such thing now, Mistress Lucy," he said, "unless indeed one should name

his blessed Majesty, who hath touched for the Evil five hundred persons in one day, whereof a many testify to have received great benefit, and it were treason to his Majesty to doubt it. But it is no treason, neither to his Majesty nor to our blessed Lord and Saviour, to say that no evil spirit is needed to account for a simple case of *scrophula fugax*, a mere swelling of the conglobate glands of the neck, such as I suppose most of these cases to have been . . .” The learned man might have launched into a dissertation on the King’s Evil, as *scrophula* was called in those days, but Lucinda interrupted.

“Leave this now, Master Phinehas—though I may ask you more of it hereafter—to tell me what I seek to know of this malady of Sir Oliver, and what he has bidden me to ask you. Is his ailment what is known to the folk of these parts as the Falling Sickness? and if it be so, what is there that may be a remedy to it, and how should it be employed, seeing that he is untractable, and opposes all advice or help of medicine?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and the bones of them cracked as his hands had done. “For the treatment, it must needs be the same as that of any patient who will not be treated, except it may be a child that can be controlled. Leave him alone till he come to a wiser mind, and pray God he may not die in the interim.”

“And for the nature of the malady?”

“For its nature, so far as I may pronounce without seeing the patient, it hath all the character of true *epilepsia cerebialis*, having seized upon him suddenly and without forewarning—without, as I understand, even the slightest *vertigo* or *scotomia*—and being accompanied by all the specific symptoms thereof. But in view of the

injury of the parrot's beak, however slight the hæmorrhage, we may hope that the attack belongs rather to the class of *epilepsia occasionalis*, and may not recur, or but little; and may vanish altogether with the removal of the irritation that has caused it."

"Is there anything that I can be beforehand with as a precaution, should another attack come? Or any care of his diet or such like, whereby I may influence him unawares for his good?"

In reply the doctor advised a course of treatment that his hearer knew would only exasperate her patient. She could never limit his nourishment to *ptisans*, which indeed are nothing but barley flour or lentils boiled in water, even though they were prepared from the receipt of Hippocrates, and sanctioned by the practice of Celsus. Still less would she dare to attempt to purge the acrid humours from the inmost recesses of the body by introducing white hellebora surreptitiously into his aliments. Therefore, as it was also out of the question to relieve by bleeding the plethora of the veins, due to the corruption of the blood, whereby (saith Hippocrates) the spirits are denied a passage through them, the worthy doctor was at a loss to make further suggestion. Should an attack recur, it might be well, he said, to thrust a stout cork at the outset between the teeth of the patient, to lessen the danger of their closing on the tongue, and also to lay open the throat and breast to the air. A pail of cold water might be thrown over him at the outset. But from this Lucinda shrank, as from other demonstrative remedies.

"Then, indeed, mistress," said the doctor upon this, "I can be of little service to you, and may as well be jogging; for there are others that call for my aid, and are

more complaisant in the use of it. But I may say this, from my own experience of this malady—though I know not what the judgment would have been of Hippocrates nor of Praxagoras—that any contradiction to the patient's will, or thwarting of intention, may well lead to an outbreak or convulsion. So my counsel is that he be opposed in nothing, even to the smallest trifle."

He said this with earnest emphasis; and Lucinda, as he seemed to wait for her assurance that it should be borne in mind, nodded her assent to him; the more easily that she had very little disposition to oppose Sir Oliver in anything, even could she hope for success in doing so. The doctor then took his leave and his fee and departed, refusing Lucinda's invitation to him to remain and take his midday meal at the family table, for which the bell was at the moment ringing.

The usage at the Hall had till lately been, as in other great houses in those days, that all the household should eat together, the dishes going first to the upper table—above the salt, as the phrase was. But since her ladyship's departure, in wrath at Sir Oliver's public neglect of her, and still worse public devotion to others more attractive—though, indeed, she had naught to complain of that was not the lot of other wives in her rank of life—the great dining-room had been left to the household, Sir Oliver and his company of the time being leaning to the privacy of a separate repast in another apartment. This change had not held good when there were guests to the number of more than one or two; and when this was so, her mock headship of the house was not unwelcome to Lucinda, however much she knew the men's courtesy was but a pretext, and the women rarely in a position to cast a stone at her, were it never so small.

But on this day, seeing Sir Oliver came not to table, and seemed like to remain away, she was glad of the secluded room, and the eyes of Rachel Anstiss alone, little as she liked them.

And yet it was grievous enough to her, when she took her seat at the board and awaited the coming of Sir Oliver—for so she might have done another time, not waiting for his escort to table—that this time he came not, but only John Rackham, with a surly message, or one surlily given.

“The master eats in his room. . . . What wine will ’a drink, eh? Why, the old sack of the third bin, with his grandsire’s seal on it. Trust un!” This man made no show of deference, using to Lucinda no name or title of address, and only stopping short with a grin of using her maiden name, that he had known her well by, from childhood. He grinned over the wine, but still surlily. “Why—here be the keys of ’un,” said he. “And you be to come to the cellar, for a safeguard I shouldn’t help myself!” Had his grin been all the words in his power to speak, he could not have said more plainly: “I should have been the bearer of no such charge had the parson had his say over the two of you at the altar.” His thought glared through it, unmistakable.

“Go on in front, John Rackham,” she said; “I will follow you.” For she hated this man and his bluntness less than the mock courtesy of Rachel Anstiss and the others.

The cellar was old, though the house was new, and dated back to the days of John of Gaunt, when the priory was built, that was cleared away in the early time of Queen Elizabeth to make way for the Hall, only a century old now at most, and the work of Sir Oliver’s



grandfather. Another century has come and gone since then, and the great house, with its stone façade and terrace, all moss-grown and stone-cropped, and silvery with lichens, stands at this hour untenanted, and has done so for twenty years past. Of the tales such as are told in plenty of old, deserted houses—tales of spectres seen and gruesome voices heard, by night and day—Croxley Hall has more than its fair share; and among these none is better remembered or oftener told than the legend of the murder of the nun Mary, who hid herself away, when her fellows were driven forth from their nunnery near at hand, in the already deserted priory, and met her fate at the hands of certain roysterers, being found dead next day in the very vault where Sir Oliver kept such good store of wine. For in that vault, it was said, so sure as the day of her death came round, might be heard at midnight such disturbance as would tell the manner of it to whoso had the courage to listen alone in the darkness, shortly after the stroke of twelve. For the truth of which story none can vouch, seeing that he who has heard these sounds cannot be got to speak of them, from sheer horror.

Now, this Lucinda had no fear of the Nun's Cellar, as it was always called; but some curiosity to see it, which doubtless made her the readier to follow John Rackham's horn lanthorn down the winding stair that led to it. By its light she could make out that it was a spacious crypt, having a good span of arched roof, with here and there some moulded corbel or pendentive or scrap of sculptured imagery, headless or handless, a token of the old foolish faith of her forefathers, of which she took little heed; or carved lettering that would have had no meaning for her could she have deciphered it, being in Latin.



“So this is where the girl was murdered,” said she to Mr. Rackham, as he stooped to a low bin where the cobwebs lay thick on the bottles, all but where some had been removed of late.

The groom brought out his bottle, and stood wiping the cobweb from it with his hand. He looked at the mark on the cork, opening the lanthorn for more light. Then, seeming satisfied, he closed it up, and answered: “Ay—and she walks! . . . Seen her my own self?—not I, nor heard her! But they do say she do, Candlemas night; and ye mun hear her squealin’ to un to kill her, for God’s mercy! There’s the tale they tell, mistress. I’ve had no hand in the making of it.” He blew the smoky flame out as they left the crypt below them and reached daylight again, and added, as he finally closed the lanthorn: “It’s an ugly class of tale, to my thinking.” It was, and Lucinda was glad to get back to the sound of the birds. For the stairway opened on a side-garden, and it was a step to the main entry they had come by.

A rider had come to the forecourt of the house while she was absent on this matter of the wine, and she would have to pass him if she entered by the front door, her nearest way back. For he had entered and was speaking with someone within, while his horse cropped the loose herbage scattered here and there, grown through the joints of the brick paving, or on the turf skirting on either side the doorway, his reins hanging unsecured, as though no restraint were in his case needed. Lucinda thought at first to enter by a side-door; but she knew the horse, and could not pass it by without a word, and she called it by name—“*Aeolus!*”

A mouthful of vetch was too good to lose, but the beautiful creature swung his black head round to greet

an old friend, and awaited her caress, but munching the while earnestly. And, gigantic as was his head, and like enough by some chance movement to shake her off unwittingly, Lucinda threw her arms about it as a lover, and took the sweet breath of his nostrils without shrinking.

“*Aeolus, Aeolus,*” she cried, “I little thought to see you again . . . so soon!” But the ending words were an afterthought, for she would not admit the seeming of her first, that they spoke of a lasting exile from her home.

At her speech the rider turned and came out, and it was then she heard the voice of Sir Oliver calling aloud from the landing of the great stair above. She heard her own name, and knew she must go, and, indeed, her heart leaped with joy within her that he should call for her at last. But she could not pass the man who stood beneath the porch without a word of greeting, or a pressure of the hand in memory of their old days together, or a word of news of her father and her old home. For he and she had been nursed at the same breast, and had grown up together; so much as brother and sister—that neither had ever thought to change that relation to another.

That which passed, passed quickly; and Lucinda afterwards found it hard to recall in their order the events that followed. And she could not have told them had she tried.

“*Roger!*” she cried, but not over-loud. “Do not look so horror-stricken, for God’s love! Am I not Lucy still?” For, be it kept in mind, she still had no thought but that her father was alive and well—her father, whom her foster-brother, but two hours since, had left lying dead.

“Are you still Lucy?” said he. “Then all the world is wrong, and nothing is left but Death.” For, having no

conception that she could still be ignorant of the morning's evil work, his reasoning was that she must be changed, or her mind had given way; else she could never live tearless, as he saw her now, and little visibly touched by grief, having, indeed, fought hard against her melancholy, to be ready with a cheerful word and a laugh when Oliver should call. And there was his voice now on the stair!

"Oh, Roger, Roger!" she said. "Kiss me still as of old, and be forgiving. Have I never forgiven thee, dear boy?" For this girl was besotted with a false notion that a woman's sin was but as a man's, and a thing to be as lightly overlooked. Yet she lived in a day when women condemned women and applauded men, even as in our own.

"What is all this talk below? Why cannot the wench come when I call her?" So Sir Oliver, impatient on the stair. Whereupon the young man's breath caught up, as though he might have spoken, but would not; and then he closed his teeth as though he needed a help to keep silence.

"I am coming, dearest Oliver—I am coming. Let me have but a word with Roger, my brother. Dost thou not know he is my brother?" She tried a laugh, but it came awkwardly. She could do no better, harassed as she had been, and not knowing what next to doubt or fear.

"Has he anything to say to me, that he comes here now?"

Then the young man found his voice; but it was little like the voice Lucinda remembered in the old days, and it grated on her.

"I have a word to say to you, Sir Oliver, or it may be two. But I would soonest say it outside, and alone."

Then Sir Oliver said: "Be it so! But mark you, Roger Locke, the fault has been none of mine throughout!" And in all this Lucinda could guess nothing—for how should she?—of her father's death, and the weight on Roger's heart, and his purpose.

She went scarlet with anger and shame that Sir Oliver should speak thus, as she thought, of herself and her part in a drama of ill-regulated passion, that she was full of willingness to accept her share of blame for, but no more. Yet so loyal was she to her love that she choked back resentful speech, but broke into passionate tears, crying: "Yes—the fault has been mine—been mine—been mine!" and fell, hiding her head on the cushion of a great settle, or couch, that had stood in the entry since the days of Sir Oliver's mother.

It seemed then to go thus, but Lucinda did not see how it came about. Sir Oliver comes storming down the stairs in half-undress, and is faced in the lower hall by the young man, mad with the knowledge of the day's murder—for so he counted it—and wroth that Lucinda, whom he thought to know all, should bear her father's death in such seeming calm, all her thought dwelling on her own misdeed. And this wrath burst out past all reason or control when there before his eyes was the murderer, face to face. Thereupon he, Roger Locke, cries out upon him for the miscreant he is. "Thou damnedest scoundrel, darest thou answer for thy crime to a man that is thy proper match?"

To whom Oliver answers: "Thou art a stripling, Roger Locke, but thy whim shall be met. Here and now, or later?" The young man makes no other answer than to dash the leather riding-glove he draws off full in the face of his opponent.

Then Lucinda starts up from her sofa, and flings her arms round Sir Oliver, crying out to him not to add murder to his other delicts. But he will none of her obstacle-making, and all but strikes her from him—would have done so but for some change that has seized him. His colour goes, and his face is drawn awry, and his eyes vanish beneath the lids, leaving the whites they stint of closing over, and from his lips again comes the awful cry she dreads, as he falls headlong forward, foaming at the mouth.

Thereon the young man thrusts back in the scabbard his half-drawn sword. “Lucy—Lucy!” he cries. “It is God’s judgment. Leave him, and come away.”

But she, kneeling by the man whose vile deed has made her his own, caresses his evil head as the convulsion rends him, and the blood comes again from his lips. “Begone yourself, Roger!” she cries, an agony of anger in her voice. “Begone yourself! Would you tempt me to desert him now, in his hour of tribulation? Go!—go!—I beg of you to go, and leave me to do what may be done. Oh, Roger, go! You do me no kindness by remaining.” And there is such force of heartfelt appeal in her voice that the young man does her bidding in silence, and hears as he leaves the house the hurry of servants hastening to help.

Thus it came about that he rode away under the shadow of a belief that Lucy, whom he had loved well in his own way from childhood, and counted as a sister, was so changed and hardened by her own sin, and the company of the reprobates she now dwelt among, that her love for her old home was dead, and her father’s memory no more than a name. Also, that she herself conceived the idea that all those she once loved had now

withdrawn from her, and thought only of avenging the dishonor done through her to their family name. All the more, she swore to herself now, that her plain duty lay in devotion to the man whom she looked on as her husband in all but form, as his pledge to her was to become so if by good fortune he should obtain relief from a lawful wife whom he hated, and who returned his hate. But she never dreamed that he had slain her father. And he, for his part, when he came back slowly to consciousness, thought rather of how he should conceal the truth from her than of the words in which he should confess his crime. For his plan was to keep her in ignorance until he should himself know for certain whether he was to be publicly denounced as his opponent's slayer, or whether the one or two who had witnessed the duel would keep their counsel, and the matter be forgotten by the world—as, strange to say, was not uncommonly the case in like matters in those days, so lightly did men hold by life and death.

Sir Oliver had little need to feel uneasy about his liability for murder, or manslaughter, under a rule of law seldom operative against the survivor of a duel to the death. For the noble old faith that God would see fairly that the man in the wrong was slain—the old confidence in the Ordeal of Battle, fought in appeal to His inexorable Justice—had survived the primitive belief in God Himself. But even if the usages of that day had countenanced vigorous action against the successful duellist, until time had been allowed for a fair start for the nearest French port, who was there in this case to take such action? The Sheriff you will say, of course! Sir Oliver was safe enough there. He was the Sheriff himself.



So if the villagers who made up the congregation of the little church buried in the trees, that almost jostled the windows of Croxley Hall, had known three mornings later—for this affair was fought out of a Thursday in mid-June—that Mr. Mauleverer of the Old Hall had been killed in a duel, they would have ascribed the lack of further news that his opponent had been apprehended by the officers of Justice to the fact that, on that very Thursday morning, their Sir Oliver (on whom action would have devolved) had been struck down an hour or so since by an attack of epilepsy. For that news went abroad without reserve—Rackham the groom took good care of that; and each time he told the tale he made the return from a gallop over the turf before breakfast fall earlier, to serve the turn of any lies he might tell later. But even if the whole tale had come out, and thereto the ancestral pew of the Raydons had not stood empty that Sunday morning, the other folk in Church would have troubled but little about the results of one duel more or less.

## CHAPTER IV

THAT summer was remembered long after for its many thunderstorms, and that day was the day of the greatest these islands had experienced within the memory of men then living. But, except for the heat, men had little to complain of in the early part of it, there being no sign of a change till some three hours after midday, when any man who was keen to watch the zenith might have seen a hurlyburly and turmoil of the lesser clouds, floating hither and thither, and swirling about, each one seeming to give chase to its fellow. And from every quarter of the heavens came mutterings of thunder, so that none could say whence would come the first lightning-flash. Then, before ever a single raindrop could be felt, all who were wise in time bestirred themselves to fly for home, to make all windows fast against the coming down-pour. Then he who, high up on the hill-side, looked out across the plain, might see a horseman here and there, alone or with a wench pillioned behind, sparing neither whip nor spur to get with all the speed he might to shelter. Or cattle, smitten with some strange apprehension, bred of foreknowledge of the matter brewing, rushing hither and thitherward in a sort of frenzy, and bellowing till it was pitiful to hear them. And here and there a careful herdsman, judging his beasts would be safest in byre, and sorely put to it to get them under cover in time.

But this storm took its course as it would, and there was no such need for haste, as it turned out. For it was

many hours before a drop of rain fell, though through all that interval low peals of thunder were answering each other from cloud to cloud, and telling of the coming time when they should be let loose and have their will. And then a great black wall that had hidden the sun grew blacker still, and spread over the whole land, bringing such swift successions of lightning-flash that good eyes could read by its aid any fair printer's type and scarcely hesitate; and then the great plash-drops of rain came, and the storm grew and grew, till well upon midnight, and raged with such fury that women—ay, and some men, too!—were found timid enough to hide away in cellars that they might not be blinded by the dazzling flashes, nor their hearts made to quake at the appalling thunderclaps.

Such was that storm which, coming as it did, set Lucinda clinging to the hope that this malady of Sir Oliver was due to the oppression of its gathering only, and would vanish with the perturbations of the atmosphere. For his part, he must have known but little of its violence; for after his second fit he fell into a kind of torpor, which lasted on throughout that night and the whole of next day. Of which unconsciousness Lucinda took this advantage, that she watched by his side, he being always insensible of her presence, instead of absenting herself any longer from his roof, and imperiously bade John Rackham begone and leave the patient to her care. Which bidding he for his part thought it safest to obey.

But this torpor had its share in deciding the future of Lucinda. For when Sir Oliver's attack had left him in this condition, and she sat by him as he lay on the bed he had been removed to—that very bed from which he

had risen to slay her father—or snatched such sleep as she might on a couch near, she was taken with a singular hallucination of her father's voice calling to her. “Lucy—Lucy!” and was so influenced by it that she schemed forthwith to ride over to her old home, and pray on her knees for his forgiveness, and seek to convince him that constancy to her lover would now be no sin, but rather the reverse, seeing his helpless plight in this disastrous illness that had befallen him. She would do most wisely, so she thought to herself, to go next day after sundown, while it was still safe for a woman to ride alone, and to reach the Old Hall before nightfall. For though her Aunts Araminta and Elsie were there, they would scruple to turn her out of doors to make her way back at night unaccompanied, and could she but live in her old home for a few hours, she would bring her father to her way of thinking.

But from this purpose she was turned by the sudden outbreak of the storm. For she was already mounting her horse to ride without escort through the twilight when it burst overhead. Whereupon she, thinking from its violence it might be a short passing tempest, such as had been so many times that summer, remained awhile; and then, seeing its fury and persistence, gave up her intention for that night, but looked to carry it out the following morning; the more readily that her night of unrest had unfitted her for action of any sort.

She had much ado to bring herself to lie down to sleep, for the heavy breathing of her bedfellow was a terror to her. And when a slow subsidence of its stertorousness left it more sweet and regular, and she had overcome the worst of her repugnance, and crept into the bed as far as might be from its object, she fancied at first that she and

sleep must be strangers to one another for that night. For it was hard to tell which was the worse lullaby—the wind and rain, or the thunderclaps that came to shake the house, each getting swiftly away into other lands, to give place to a successor that had even more to say, and said it louder. She could only bury her eyes from the glare beneath the thickness of the coverlid, and now and then look forth to see the lightning pierce the shutter-joints, and square them out in dazzling lines. And then to shrink back terrified, and picture to herself the ruined garden she would have to see when the storm had done its worst.

Thus she lay, wide awake, yet barely moving, and holding her ears to keep out the noises, until—it might be about four in the morning—there came a sudden possibility of sleep, then sleep itself; as a guest we watch for at the portal enters unawares by some postern, and touches us, for a sign of his presence. And then Lucinda, rescued from herself, dreamed in Paradise, with the world gone from her.

How long, who can say?—that is, if those are right who contend that dreams hang about the Palace of Sleep on either side, exit or entrance, but are not allowed in beyond the forecourts. To her own thinking, the dream she woke on had lasted many days, when a voice without mixed into one within it, and she started up to find the day well on, the storm at rest, and—oh, joy!—her lover dressed as though he purposed to go out riding as usual, and not to any seeming the worse for his double attack of the falling sickness. And it was his voice that she had heard in her dream, and she heard it now, but somewhat thick of speech, his bitten tongue being, as it were, the only record of his malady. Otherwise, he spoke like

enough to himself—the self of their colloquy of forty-eight hours since in the garden below the terrace.

“The beauty of Lucinda will be the greater that she hath outslept the foul weather, and awaited the greeting of the sunshine. What did you dream, mistress mine, that your eyes should not smile upon the daylight, though only for an hour?” His words were full of the artificial warmth which had ceased to please; but better that than sullenness, with no apparent cause. It was enough that he was himself again.

“I was dreaming a happy dream, sweetheart, when your dear voice woke me. Shall I tell it you?”

“So it be not another marriage to the hangman, and twins. . . .”

She interrupted him, making believe to strike him, jestingly: “Silly Oliver! Did I not say this was a happy dream? What happiness would my darling Amy’s have been, wedded to her hangman?”

“Great joy, belike, wise Lucy! A man and his calling are twain. Even if he was a bad hangman, he may have made a good lover. Except he had had to hang an old flame of hers, and hanged him ill. She might have sought to be put asunder from him for that. But tell me thine own dreams, my Lucy.”

“Mine own dream in mine own time, good plague Oliver! Get you gone now, while I dress. If I forget not the dream, it shall be told you at breakfast.” She seized on the rich black hair he was caressing, dragging it from him, and again bade him begone.

This morning was no time for breakfast under the cedar-trees. For all the underfoot, where grass grew, was no better than a sponge. And news had come that the Abbey meadows, beyond the Park, were all under water;



and the hill the Old Hall stood on seemed a distant island in the sea, and the Abbey on the shore thereof, close down to the water's edge. News came, too, of farmsteads washed bodily away, and their tenantry homeless; of giant trees stripped of leaf and bough, or blown down outright, or cleft by the lightning. And of one great oak, near the New Hall, in Sir Oliver's own Park, simply riven to small shreds by a thunderbolt, that had fired a hayrick near by; but the torrents of rain quenched the flames, and left it smoking, as might be seen from the windows that looked over the lawn to the Park. And there Lucinda, joining Sir Oliver at the breakfast-table, could smell the burning hay, and feel her eyes smart from the stinging of its fumes. Then she thought of the uncut grass in the Abbey meadows, and spoke of it to Sir Oliver.

He grinned a little, but as one in pain, for the damage done to his mouth had left it sore. "There will be but little more hay cut this year in the Abbey Meadows," said he, meaning thereby that there would be none. Then he added: "But what is to be thought on is the ground for riding. We shall see by noon." Then, as one who casts away careful thoughts, and would turn to trifling: "What was thy notable dream that was to be told me, sweet Lucinda mine? Tell it me now, and leave the floods to dry as they may."

She, giving way to him in all things, asked nothing of what riding he spoke of, but set about to tell her dream. Which, when she began it, seemed to come to little or nothing as a story, however sweet its memory might be in the mind of the teller. For what was it after all but a jumble of recollections of all the Yuletides of her youth, and all the games and festivities and gatherings

that made the Old Hall famous in those days. But, as might easily be, the dreamer's memory had not served to separate the dead from the living. So that all she had ever known were there present. She found Sir Oliver somewhat hard against the telling of it, or as one who humours a child—chilling, as it were, her joy in the life and warmth of the dreamworld. But he relaxed a little of this when she came to tell him of how it all ended; how in the midst of a dance it came upon her that no one in the dream saw her nor spoke to her, and had not done so since this dream began, which seemed a matter of days, though how Lucinda knew not. And it got to the worst plight for her when she could make none of them feel nor hear; when she kissed the woman-kind and they heeded her not, and played notes upon her sister Amy's virginal even while Amy's own hands were on the keys, and yet none took note of it, nor protested. And last of all, her father was calling to her, "Lucy!—where is Lucy?" and she all the while close to hand, unheard and unseen. And then the voice of Sir Oliver crossed his in the dream, and she waked, as already told.

But Lucinda could not guess, neither can we, why Sir Oliver's slight impatience of her dream should vanish when it grew to sheer nonsense. Yet it was so, and he laughed quite good-humouredly when she told of the keys of the virginal, though he said but little of her father's calling unheeded. Indeed, he balked her words curtly at the end of her tale, saying it was now time to speak of their journey. Whereupon says she, "What journey, Oliver mine? I know of no journey."

"Because I have not told of it, thou fairest of wenches! I tell thee now, that thou mayst know it. An hour

before noon we start to ride for Kips Manor, and your woman Anstiss will do well to have the packing of your wardrobe ready, as I told her, else she may find service with another master as soon as she likes."

"The packing of my wardrobe! And where is Kips Manor, that I never heard of it in my life, and why should we ride there?" Then it crossed her mind what the crabbed old medico—whom she could not but trust a little, for all his pomposity—had said about yielding to Sir Oliver's least whim. So she said, as though on a second thought: "Yet why should we not? I will go joyfully, for my part, sweet Oliver mine, wherever you would have me go, so long as I may be beside thee. Which of our household do you mean to have to ride with us?" But her pleasure was affected, for the news of this journey was unwelcome enough, seeing that it would carry her still farther away from her old home.

Sir Oliver's laugh was not all secret, but came out in his voice as he replied: "Never a wench of them all, my Lucy, and no man neither, all but John Rackham, and young Kenneth, may be, to bring back the horses. He is but a boy, and no man. But fear nothing for thyself, my girl; you will find a tirewoman, I promise you, and a rare one, at Kips Manor, though there is not another that I know nearer than King's Crawley, nine miles away; and she belongs to a Duchess, who would not spare her on a light pretext. For the journey there, it is but a three days' ride, and thine own hands may even do at shift for so short a time."

She answered with a willing acquiescence, saying jestingly: "John Rackham must clear the powder from my hair, if my lord is too lazy for the task." But, indeed, hair-powder was hateful to Lucinda, and in no case,

except for some great gala, would she easily consent to the use of it. So she felt the separation from Rachel Anstiss but little, and all the less for her small eyes and large teeth, which she had no love for.

But what was Kips Manor, and where? Sir Oliver was not slow to tell something of this Manor House she had never heard of, of which he was lord. It lay in the flat country out towards the sea, and the town nearest to it was named strangely to Lucinda's ears, so that she easily forgot it, which might not have been had she ever heard spoken the name of the Saint it was called from. But her youth had heard little of the calendar of Saints; and her desire now was to know what kind of a house was this Manor of Kips, and Sir Oliver was ready enough to answer her. It was an old house, with a four-square wall and a moat of brackish water, kept salt by the sea-springs from below, working through a porous soil of shingle and gravel, whenever there came a spring-tide rising more than common high. Which under-working of the sea-tides had also made all the wells brackish, and unfit to drink, or for any purpose but cooking fish or sousing meat for junk. Also for this cause, and the sea-winds charged with spray, no garden-growth was possible, and nothing grew but tamarisk, or toad-grass, where once were rose and lily in abundance. Then what brought about the change? asked Lucinda. Just a freak of Father Neptune, said Sir Oliver. For one day the sea, that had never reached at the highest nearer the house than three miles, must needs overrun two miles of meadow that of right belonged to his manor, and now remained, giving no ear to any claim for foreshores from their dispossessed owners. And at the lowest limit of the tides of the full and new moon might be seen, where

once a village had stood, some remains of a church and almonry, of which the dues were still claimed and enjoyed by successive incumbents, coming once in the year to read prayers and begone, but from a boat if the tide were not low enough. One of whom having been swept out to sea by a fierce land wind, and no more heard of, this duty had ever since been done by a curate.

But how came it that no one lived in this house now? Because, said Sir Oliver, the house was now no different from what any house would be if it were built in a place where none had asked for it. Once it stood near a small port, with a fishing population and pasturage for cattle round about. Now it was little better than a salt marsh, though there were still a few fisher-folk scattered along the shore, and the house a five-mile ride from the nearest hamlet, and not so much as a homestead left on the land poisoned with the salt. That was quite enough, to his thinking, without a curse, to account for why the house should be tenantless. But what did Sir Oliver mean, asked Lucinda, by that word, "without a curse"?

"Why, thus," said he—"gossips tell this tale, at least—that a curse—whatever that may be—was spoken upon the house by an ill-wisher, and the spell laid upon it that no drop of rain should fall on it, even though the land about were under flood."

"But does no rain fall there, then?" asked Lucinda.

"Simple Lucinda!" said Sir Oliver. "It rains at Kips just as it rains elsewhere, and to him who drinks no water, roof-water and well-water are welcome alike. I would wager—but I should find none to take my wager, though I backed it with a round sum—that we shall find every tank and water-butt full to brimming over, and old Madge Hatsell, who keeps house year to year, never

budging outside the gate, ready to swear this is the first time a drop has fallen on the roof since the days of my ancestress, Jean Raydon, who is held answerable by the tellers of the story for the curse, as well as for many another drawback to the charms of the neighbourhood." Sir Oliver held on talking in this slight way, and Lucinda listened, happy to find him cheerful and ready for converse, and indeed accepting it all as a token that the whole attack had been caused by the conditions of oppressive heat of the days before, and would now die down and—please God!—never reappear.

But the truth was, had she known it, that his amenity was bred of a cunning intent to keep her still in ignorance of her father's death, until all should be in train for their departure to this lonely house in the flats. For now, the storm being over, and the ways less foul hour by hour, folk could be heard coming and going betwixt the Hall and the village, and any of these might chance to be the bearer of the news; and this although the flood had stopped all trafficking for the time between those on either side of it. So long as Sir Oliver held her by his talk, dwelling on this new excursion without giving reason for it, there was little chance of her hearing the story of that fatal morning; which news, as time went on, he felt less and less inclination to be the bearer of himself.

Therefore the talk ran on, Sir Oliver telling somewhat more of the legend of the curse on Kips Manor—which tale has no concern for this story, so no pause need be made for it—until, to Lucinda's great surprise, the woman Rachel Anstiss suddenly appeared with the announcement that her mistress's riding-gear awaited her, and that the clothes she had been bidden to pack were also ready. Whereat, though Lucinda felt some-



what nettled at this abrupt and masterful treatment, more the due of a child than a grown woman, she—always bearing in mind the injunction of Dr. Phinehas to oppose Sir Oliver in nothing—gave her assent with only a slight protest; and indeed, being young and full of life, was ready enough to adventure on a new journey. For who could say but it might prove eventful, and at least have interest and excitement in the mere change of scene and arrival at a house so strange and strangely situate as this one Sir Oliver had described to her. But she would not consent to start except she first wrote a letter to her father, so that he might know of her whereabouts in any case. For she never believed in her heart that the separation between them would be final, building always on the idea that some lucky chance would leave Sir Oliver free to wed, and never doubting he would do so at the first possibility, come what might!

The unhappy misconception of thought and motive between herself and her foster-brother, Roger Locke, had made her apprehensive lest she might be oversanguine in this hopeful view of the case. Was it possible that her lawlessness had proved unpardonable in her father's eyes? Was it the knowledge that this was all the message he could bring to his sister that had hardened Roger's heart against her, and set his face and made his speech cut through her like a knife? No—no!—it was nothing but the boy's harsh misjudgment of her dear love, that would have ended in bloodshed; but that, by God's mercy, a thing less hard to bear, though cruel enough, had come between to stop it. Yet the more her mind misgave her of her father's bias against herself, the more resolved she was to let no chance slip to bring him into touch with her again. So she went to her room

—Sir Oliver, mind you, made sure she did not go about the house—and wrote him a long letter, praying again for his forgiveness, free of the condition she had neither will nor heart to comply with—that of leaving her life of open sin and returning to her home. For that is how he had written to her, saying all might be forgiven; and for his part, could Sir Oliver free himself of his lawful bond of matrimony, he would receive him as his son as though nothing had happened, villain and traitor as he held him to be. But for a persistence in wrong-doing, which he called hard names enough, as was the fashion in those days, he would none of it. Against all which this letter she wrote him, as he lay dead, was a plea and a protest; and she was well an hour writing it, sometimes not able to see her words for her tears.

But that letter never reached the Old Hall. Sir Oliver took good care of that, bearing it away himself with a promise it should go at the earliest, and locking it in a private drawer, in case on his return it should prove of value towards some scheme of his own for ill. For he knew of none other. After which he hastened back to the girl, who was making ready to ride, and escorted her with much show of courtesy to where the horses awaited them; to wit, their own and John Rackham's, and another for the undergroom in charge of two stout nags with pack-saddles, such as one may still see even now in all roadless districts, where no cart or coach may safely pass. And at the saddle-bow of each of the men were great holster pistols for defence.

This was the way which all young and strong people chose for travelling in the days of this story. For though our forefathers had then used coaches for two generations, and one or two stage-coaches were already running—as

between London and Edinburgh—yet these were so cumbersome and heavy and even the main roads so bad that none who could back a horse would endure the jerk and shaking of coach-wheels, which were not even furnished, as now, with suspenders or springs, but on a rigid axle. So that old folk and invalids had much ado to travel at all. And though there was this great advantage, that they were kept in one spot, and unable to move from place to place, in a manner unsettling to themselves and all their belongings, yet when it was matter of life or death to get quickly—for example, from London to Edinboro', as may now be done easily in six days—it was ill for him that was no equestrian. For unless he could cover the distance afoot, he had no choice but to ride with the mail service or in a cart or waggon, going maybe at a speed of five miles an hour at most, over roads often impassable from water, and infested with outlaws and thieves of every sort. So that such slow-going vehicles as these dared not pass through a lonely district without a sufficient armed escort. And even then there was never security that the men engaged in this service would not themselves be in league with malefactors, either turning boldly to ransack the pockets and portmanteaus they had undertaken to protect, or turning tail by arrangement at the approach of accomplices, not to lose the chance of profiting in a like way again. But from such as these Sir Oliver's party had not much to fear, being well armed for resistance; besides not carrying with them goods of value, such as would be thought by marauders to justify the risk of encountering them.

The journey to Kips Manor was all but a four days' ride, though had there been no woman of the party a few hours might have been saved, at some cost in

fatigue to horse and rider. As it was, the last day was very fatiguing to Lucinda; for they slept under a roof on the three first nights only, and on this last night lay out on the fern and bracken of an open heath, as gipsies camp even nowadays by the roadside. But though she enjoyed the strangeness and novelty of this free life—for a summer night beneath the moon and stars is no tax on endurance, but rather a luxury—still, the very newness of it all stood between her and sleep. And when they made ready for a start in the early morning, an hour after dawn, this weariness made itself felt of a sudden; and never was a woman gladder at heart than she when Sir Oliver, riding at her side along an upland of smooth pastures skirting a wide plain, said to her that its far horizon was the sea, that could be seen were it not for the mist. But the mist would clear as the sun mounted in the heavens. And when it did so, the gables of the old Manor House stood up above it, and it had the look of a lake or flood rising as high as the dormer windows of the roof. Then came the sun in greater strength, and the mist fell away, and Lucinda rejoiced to see how close at hand the house really was.

But there was still ground to cover, and at the end of it what seemed best to Lucinda was to drink a cup of milk and lie down; closing door and window, and making it night—or the nearest that might be, with the sounds of the daytime without to testify against it.

It would be hard to say which weighed most with Sir Oliver in this sudden resolution to withdraw Lucinda from possible communication with her family—whether his repugnance to speaking of her father's death to her, or his dread that she should hear of it from someone else. Had he been weary of her, he would not have

cared a straw—so, at least, he reasoned with himself—where or when or how she came to the knowledge of it. But just for now—perhaps for a few months if all went well—he would not have Lucinda hate him. She would discard her father's murderer; and *he* wanted to discard *her*, and to choose his time, as a nobleman might then do without blame—nay, may do still, for that matter, not only without shame or remorse, but even with some sense of plume or strut, as for pride of an achievement done. And what could serve his ends better than a couple of months at Kips Manor, where no one would ever follow them; and where, be sure, if one did, he need never see the inside of the great boundary wall, except he climbed it at night. And in that case, were there not the bloodhounds, bred from the pair his father had brought home from Cuba? He would see to it that they were loosed at night. But at this thought the guilty man broke into a vexed laugh at the restlessness of his own conscience. Fancy begging and borrowing that trouble! Fancy dreaming for a moment that any living creature would ride to Kips Manor to tell a piece of news all would believe to be well known there already! All, that is to say, who knew of this visit of his to the old house, and of his reason for going there.

This disturbing thought had found him alone, as he paced to and fro after a repast Lucinda had not shared, she having begged to be left undisturbed, even though she slept the day out. If he got quit of it, it was less that he succeeded in laughing himself out of his absurdity than that another worse than itself came to oust it. He had lighted his pipe filled with the strong Virginian tobacco that was in those days the smoker's only resource. And now the sting of the smoke was painful to his bitten



tongue, that was slow to heal of itself, and the worse that they had fared somewhat roughly on the journey, though their food had been wholesome enough in itself. It brought him to the question:—Why must this accursed malady come on him just now, of all times? Had he ever experienced a symptom of the like before? Never, in his memory; that he could swear to! But was there no nurse's tale he could recall? Had his mother told him nothing? . . .

There—at the word! Again that hideous dream of the morning of the duel! Could he never shake free from it?—would this go on for ever? Was he always to be the dupe and slave of his own illusions?

Then followed one of those strange phases of mind we all knew so well, in which all that is around us seems to have been there before, at some time we cannot fix, try how we may. All men seem to know of this freak of perception, but none to find a pleasure in it, if we may judge by the common speech of those who have experienced it. Sir Oliver very surely found none, but rather the pain some say is always present in the mind of demented folk. And this all the more that the thing seemed to connect itself with that ugly dream of his, and both with that pause in the duel when the seconds had spoken a moment apart. He knew not which of the three he was thinking of.

But it passed away in a moment—the whole phantasy! Yet it left behind it a disposition on Sir Oliver's part to allow ideas he would at another time have condemned as mere druff and superstition to take possession of his mind. How if there were truth in the legends of men possessed by evil spirits, whose outward symptoms seemed so disastrously like his own, as Lucinda had described



it to him? Had we not assurance of Holy Writ that demoniacs were so possessed, and that the fiend had been cast out by our Lord Himself, and even by others less than He, whose power might not compare with His? For this Oliver had been well grounded in his youth in all that was needful for the practice of his ancestors' faith, though, indeed, that faith had only been of service to him thus far, that had he not known it he had been at a sore strait for blasphemy—a thing congenial to him, and very essential to his bearing as a man of fashion. But here in this lonely garden, with no gay companions for interchange of wit, he fell a prey to nervous and unruly fancies; and the more he dwelt upon and brooded over them the worse they grew, till he was half-minded to go to Lucinda's room, and rouse her, and make her come forth and be merry to please him. But he refrained, wishing her to be at her best when darkness came. For this was the way he treated women, doing all he might, without overmuch trouble to himself, to keep them cheerful, brilliant, and beautiful, for his own sake. In doing which he no doubt studied in a sense their happiness, just as it might be said that he studied also the happiness of his horse. But when at last his horse failed him, or got spavin or wind-gall, or broke his knees, he would turn him forth to the knacker without remorse, unless he thought there was still service in him for farm-work, or cart, or dray. And the like held good, in its degree, when women were in question, and no lesser beasts of burden.

So he hung about chafing and finding fault with the old woman, Madge Hatsell, who had charge of the house in his absence, and who, having been nowise prepared for his coming, had been hard put to it to make a show of any reception for Lucinda. But her master rated her soundly,

—although, indeed, her success, considering the circumstances, deserved rather praise than blame—saying it was her duty to keep the house in constant readiness for occupation, and that he looked to find it so even if he should come unexpectedly at midnight. It may be this injustice was of small importance, seeing the old woman was all but stone-deaf—at least, seemed well able to affect deafness, if she were not.

The household, on their arrival, was at its fewest—in fact, there was no one in the house but this old woman, a girl, and a gardener. Other servants were at hand, though not in the near neighbourhood, having to be summoned from distances of three or four miles or more to make up such a retinue as becomes a gentleman's house in the country; but these were wanted only during the occasional visits of Sir Oliver, the house being at other times unused. It was not from want of will to have it tenanted, and bringing a good rent, that Sir Oliver had acquiesced in its present condition, he having, as well as his father before him, sought to find an occupant. But one would not close his bargain for one reason, another for another. For one it was too large, for another too low down. Another would have it built with the side now to the east looking to the south, and yet another, who would not at the last moment sign a lease that had been prepared with much disputation, having deferred his signature till he had made trial of the house by living in it for a week, decided that the easterly wind off the sea blew too strong o' nights, and no sleep could be in it for the howling thereof and the sound of waves confronted by a long breastwork of shingle less than a mile away. Also, he made complaint of certain birds that would not be content to fly across

the flats without a strange cry that gave him discomfort, as he judged it by the sound to betoken pain. Which made Lucinda wonder how folk can differ so in their conceits of this and that, for this same cry became so great a joy to her ears that she would listen for it in the solitude, and was ill-pleased that Sir Oliver had not the same love for it, calling it a tuneless screech, and the bird a sea-cob, and condemning it as useless for food, except it were for the eggs. But it was otherwise with the little terns, or sea-swallows, that were plentiful on these coasts, for the flesh of these he accounted a delicacy.

## CHAPTER V

IN those days the General Post Office had but recently been established, and its operations were confined to the delivery of letters in market-towns at the most. Those who dwelt in remote villages, or, worse still, in isolated houses, very far from any town, like Kips Manor, could only hope to receive letters by special messenger, unless they expected nothing better than the slow delivery by carriers, whose cumbrous waggons crawled from village to village over roads that often proved impassable from stress of weather, even in the summer months causing delay of days, or even weeks. Sometimes, however, in case of such extreme delay, a horseman would be found who for a prospect of reward would carry the lighter mails on and deliver them at places off the route or at known houses of call by the way.

At the end of the third week of her life at Kips Manor Lucinda began to watch for a letter from her father, and to wonder none came. Surely, she thought, her fault—grievous as she was ready to think it—was not such that it should cancel all love of a father such as hers for any daughter, however much she were to blame. And see!—she had loved him well. Was it not so? No—it was impossible that he should not write—mere silence would be cruel. She *could* not believe, try how she might, that that letter of hers could remain unanswered. And yet—no answer came!

So long as the shortness of the time forbade any answer but one borne by a special messenger, she was at peace;

even more so that the distance between them had marked out a period in which no letter could come, miracle apart. But when this time had lapsed, and thereto such as might reasonably have been needed for a letter to reach her through the existing channels of communication, her restlessness grew and grew. And though she knew how ill it would be for her to give offence to the man on whom she knew herself to be so terribly dependent, yet she must either risk speech with him about this or go mad. For who else was there, with whom she could speak?

It was then in the fifth week of this strange lonely residence in what was to all intents and purposes a wilderness—at least, so far as almost total privation of human intercourse can make a wilderness—that Lucinda resolved, even should she risk his anger, to speak of this uneasiness of hers to Sir Oliver. The place was the sea-beach, over a mile from the house, and the hour was after sundown. For the great heat had kept them within doors through the day, and now the evening was cool, and the air off the sea sweet in the lungs, and the plash of little waves sweet to hear, whereof each one seemed to be the last, and a fit herald of perfect silence.

“Sweetheart Oliver,” said she, “my father writes not.”

Sir Oliver cleared his voice to make way for his words; then in his artificial way, speaking as of some third person, answered thus: “What matters it to my Lucinda that her father writes not to scold his wanton little daughter, and to summon her away from the side of her lawless lover?” For this was the gay way of Sir Oliver, a light-some affectation of acknowledgment of wrong-doing that would be candid about it were the offence never so trivial. But his levity sat ill upon him to-night, and his eyes never

met Lucinda's, that were fixed on him there in the moonlight, watching how white he grew.

Then she, noting that he had failed to achieve a would-be carelessness of manner, but loth to ascribe an ill motive to him, cried out aloud: "Oh, Oliver, tell me truth! Has a letter come from him that you are keeping back from me? If that be so, tell me of it, and let me read it, even if I wince in the reading. Give it me, Oliver—give it me!"

When lies are afoot it is sweet to have a word or two of truth to speak, and a mighty ease to the conscience. Sir Oliver's voice came forth freely to say: "No, Lucinda mine! I give thee my honour for it, there has been no letter." Then, for a moment, the taste of truth was in his mouth; but it was all the truth he had to tell. He would not spoil it by a lie, and was silent.

"Oliver, there has been something! You are keeping something from me. Tell it me now—now!"

"What ails the wench that she should cry out so of a sudden? No, Lucy Crazy pate, there has been neither letter nor aught else to tell you of. Leave your intractable parent to himself to come round as he may, and be at peace!" For though he thought to himself, "Shall I speak fairly and tell her all?"—there was that in his heart which said: "Try to speak. Thou canst not!" So he was forced back on the blank stupidity of blind falsehood. Yet he had but little difficulty to speak it. He had sealed his pact with the Devil, and looked to him for help.

She answered his lie with her truth. "I will be at peace, dear love, even though no letter comes. I will be all thou would'st have me be. But will you not tell me more? Is there no word of my father to be told that



you know, and are keeping back?" Then, always in fear that she might somehow ruffle Sir Oliver's temper, and so provoke a return of his malady, she kissed him tenderly, drawing his face to her lips, as she readily might. For he was a man of no great stature, though built strongly, and broad, while she was of a full height for a woman of twenty, but slender, and in all things gracious and delicate; so that anyone would have said who saw them that it was their unlikeness had brought them together. But such a one would have wondered at the roughness of his speech in reply, seeing no cause for it.

"Have I not told thee, silly girl? What reason, think you, should I have to speak untruthfully?" Then, with the thought in his mind that each word he said made it harder to be truthful in the end: "Your father may well have written, and his letter be lost on the way. Let be, and be patient till a letter comes. How can it be known, I ask you, that he has not written?" And in this, though, of course, she could not understand it so, he was, as it were, pleading with empty air for a right to falsehood. He resented the invasion of his secrecy by the pert readiness of a mere girl. Who else had told the facts, that suspicion should touch the mind of Lucinda? Only he himself knew them, for John Rackham would be silent; and had he not a right to his reserve?

But she, catching this half-resentment in his voice, and all alive to her fear of his terrible disorder, pressed him for no further answer. Her arm was in his or about his neck as they lingered easily on the smooth footways of flat sea-sand, though now and again they walked apart on the shingly intervals, crushing the pebbles underfoot. "What an accursed noise these stones make!" said Sir Oliver.

But Lucinda was on the side of the stones. What could Sir Discontent ask better than such a pretty music to be made by his great clumsy feet? And look, too, at the little sparks of frayed moonlight that the foam had churned, and that had floated away into the dark water. They would stick on one's hands, and gleam in the dark. But Sir Oliver, though he laughed about his heavy tread, and was less morose, would have it these were nothing but the corruption of a dead fish, and not over-wholesome to be handled. He desired that Lucinda should not stoop at the water's edge to catch up the foam and run it through her fingers, for there might be danger therein. At which she laughed merrily, and did it all the more. For it had been an ease to her mind only to have spoken aloud about her father, even though what she said and what he answered had left her none the wiser.

But this talk affected him otherwise, as he knew now that the gloom of a constant secrecy must settle on him. Every hour that passed must make it harder to tell Lucinda of her father's death. He reproached himself that he had not had the courage to speak at first that day in the garden. He might then have confessed all, affecting a keen remorse for the outcome of a challenge he, as a man of honour, had no choice but to accept. He might have laid the whole thing to an accident, saying that he had never dreamed that a man so much older than himself could make such indomitable sword-play that it should be difficult for him, past-master that he was of swordsmanship, to disarm such an opponent, or disable him by some slight wound, or end the quarrel on some technical pretext of satisfied honour. But the chance was gone now—the chance there was then for a show of uncontrollable grief—of an affectation which

would have given it to him to mix his tears with hers over a father's grave. It had come to this now—that all that was left him was to cling to the hope that he might cease to care about this woman in any way before the news of the misadventure—as his speech to himself began to call it—should reach her ears. That he should be able, in short, to keep her in ignorance until he had wearied of her, and another might fill her place. Then he would do her no wrong, but would act as any other man of fashion and spirit would do—pass her on to a friend the richer by a profuse outlay on jewellery for her person. Oh no!—there should be no injustice to Lucinda through him.

But how the thought we choose and fancy our own hates the intrusion of the thought we have no choice in! Through all that was articulate in this speech of his mind there would come creeping, creeping, a something . . . was it a misgiving, or was it a conviction? . . . a thing ambiguous in all but that it was a discomfort. He had never heard it so plainly, seen it or felt it so clearly, as on this evening when he stood watching the girl's figure against the restless silver of the sea below the moon. The music of her laugh, slighting his injunction; its rich and joyous expansion as she sprang back, drenched, from a rush the sea made to embrace her feet, till the sweet night air seemed the sweeter for it as for a nightingale's in its hour of joy, had such power over him that he in a manner feared or resented its mastery. Often had he said to himself that hers was a sameness he should not weary of lightly, but he had always taken the period of her charm for granted. And there was in this new phase of—suppose we call it—his interest in Lucinda at least a doubt whether it might not outlast his power or his

chances of keeping her in ignorance of her father's death. It was strange that it should be so. Think how soon Jess and Kate and Sue had given all they had to give, and he had tired of them and flung them away, much as a child discards the toy it cares to possess no longer!

So the days passed, and no letter came. Then one day, when a driving small rain kept them within doors, and there was sad lack of employment or pastime, this Sir Oliver, more for an easement to his own conscience, or it may be to convince him of his power over the part he had to play, than from any gracious pity for Lucinda, must needs say: "Never look so sad, sweet Lucy; for I tell thee this—I am of the mind to think that letter never reached the Old Hall, nor your father. So hearten up, my lass, and write him another, and John Rackham shall ride with it to the Cobbler with Two Wives, where the post calls towards the end of the month for letters."

"Why, sweetheart, should not the letter I wrote reach the Old Hall?"

"Because, my Lucy, the floods would be slow to dry, and it was said the bridge was wrecked. Many a slip 'twixt cup and lip may be for wayfarers across a flooded country,—take my word for it! So sit thee down, wench, and write another, and may it have better luck!"

"Lend me your little knife that cuts so well, to make a new nib for my letter to my father." That was what she said in reply; and her voice was happy to Sir Oliver's ear, though it was gall and wormwood to his heart. But he must play his part out now—not spoil all by sickly cowardice. There was the knife, and there a new quill, and though there was no ink in the stand, it was to hand in the little bottle on the shelf. For however few folk dwelt in this house, it was well furnished in all needs of a

household from cellar to garret. There was paper, too, of divers sorts in plenty, and dust of puff-balls to drink up the ink, and chaff-wax.

“Thou canst make a new pen better than I, good Oliver, that I may write plain and clear my letter to my father. Take the knife and the quill, and God speed thy cutting!”

But the cutting prospered ill. Why should Sir Oliver’s hand be thus awkward? Lucinda wondered; then feared this was a part of the malady. Had he not rather prided himself once—at her father’s house when she knew him first—on his skill from a schoolboy in this art of pen-cutting? Indeed, Lucinda had wondered that he made no proffer of his services at the outset. Now his hand was awkward, though it shook not; and he muttered impatiently—muttered the beginnings of curses. Then in the end he flung the spoiled quill away, irritably, and bade Lucinda try her fortune on a new one. From which task she, looking up furtively, could see his face white and hard and fixed; and once a twitching of the lips and mouth, though he covered it with a contrived laugh as he met her eye.

But she was by then keen upon her letter, and gave the less attention to things of this sort; though she still feared they might be a part of the affliction that had fallen upon him. So she settled down to write, gaining in beauty as her face grew in earnestness from the words she wrote; and so on through page after page, Sir Oliver watching her askant from where he sat apart, sidelong on a chair that had a low back to it, with a hand restless on the carvings thereof. Only the scratching of the busy pen, that seemed to know no cause for hesitation, broke in upon the silence.



Sir Oliver sat and watched the writer, but glancing round at her, as though he flinched from an honest gaze, until he saw by some chance that a tear ran bright on her writing hand, and she brushed it off with the other. Then it seemed as though she drew breath with a shiver, and thereto bit back a sob. Whereupon, rising and wrapping closer round him the silk-embroidered morning-gown he wore, as was his custom, he went away silently to the window, to look forth on the squally weather and the rain-drift. And she, being deep in the wording of her tale, took no notice of his doing so; but thought hard, her face being bright through all her tears as though what she had succeeded in saying pleased her. But had she seen him more closely, she might have shuddered to note the new twitching of his lips, and how he closed his teeth on his thumb as though he would have crushed it. He was close shaven, and his hair, no longer cropped short for accommodation of his peruke, which he was not wearing now, was all in disorder; also his face was discoloured, the pallor of it coming and going, in patches. So he looked not his best as he turned to take the letter from Lucinda, when he heard her finish it.

“Give me the letter, sweetest Lucy,” said he—and his voice had a mock ring of false courtesy, such that none but a woman besotted with her passion for him could have loved him through it. But Lucinda’s ears heard it, and no fault found!

“It has not the seal yet, Oliver; and I cannot have you read it, good man! It would make thee vainer than thou art already, to know what I have written in this letter. I am in earnest, dear love!” But she trusted him with the letter, too, kissing him as she gave it. The truth is she had little choice but to hand it to him open; for



though the wax was there, and a taper, it was no matter of a moment, nor the raising of a finger, to get a taper lighted in those days.

Sir Oliver, however, was complaisant, giving his word that he would not read a line of the letter, since she wished it, and saying he would see to the proper sealing of it. And thereon he carried it away, taking also with him the chaff-wax as though to do it promptly in the kitchen, or elsewhere where there was fire. But after a short absence he returned with the letter still unsealed, saying he had told old Madge to bring a light forthwith, and what need had the old sluggard to dawdle by the way? But she came at the moment, bearing a hand-lamp for oil, and much concerned that it should not be blown out by the wind, which came in great gusts, and seemed in no difficulty to find its way into the house. But she had no mishap in lighting the little red wax taper on the writing-table, and went her way with her lamp, which was a slovenly and dirty affair, not fitted for the use of gentlefolk.

Then says Sir Oliver to Lucinda, that she was to imprint the seal on the melted wax, as soon as he should have made a careful pool of it; yet not until he should give the signal. And so it was done, and her hand was lovely in the doing of it, and sweetly tender to the touch as it met his by chance. Then again he felt that doubt of how, or when, or where he should tire of this woman, and be ready to thrust her from him.

But she gives him little time to think this over. For, being now in great spirits that she has written her letter, and it is to go, she is clamouring aloud that she herself shall use the taper and the wax for the second seal, and will have her way. Nor does her villain gainsay her, for

he knows the one seal has closed the letter beyond reopening; and he has a reason to be glad of this, as shall soon be told in this story.

So Lucinda burns the wax liberally, heedless of its cost—for it was not cheap in those days as now—and more from undue haste than any mere unsteadiness of hand she drops it at random on the paper, so that more than one spot lies outside the seal it should have been a part of. At this Lucinda is well satisfied, saying these blots of red wax be kisses she sends her father, for all they look so like drops of blood. But she then looks up, saying, "What ails thee, my Oliver?" For a gasp had come from him as of a man caught by a sudden pain, but one that stays not; catching him unawares, else he had been silent on it.

"What should ail me?" is all he says, but peevishly. Then he takes the letter from her, and goes forth to give it to John Rackham, who is to ride with it to the place of call. But this groom's training has made of him a perfect servant; for when he looks—as all do who are charged to carry letters—at the direction on the cover, and knows that he is bearing a letter to a dead man, his face says no more of his thought than the back of your tombstone or mine will one day say, whatever be incised upon the front. And Sir Oliver felt the stronger to the end of his own concealments, from the strength of this man's example. If only he, too, could keep as free of gesture or expression as some great fish in a tank, all would go well for his own needs! So thought Sir Oliver; and then he would have been glad to ease himself of an unwelcome association. For this trope of the fish had brought back a thing he hoped to have forgotten, and he had again to fight against a memory of that unearthly dream—the

dream this story told at the outset—and its intrusion into other agonizing memories that were actual, until he felt as though he scarce knew which was which, nor true from false. And this doubt was amazingly more painful than any memory taken alone. For nothing is more painful to the mind than a doubt of its own soundness.

And then, going back to Lucinda, and coming once more within the range of her sweet life, sweet although he was part of it, he was again face to face with that other perplexity, the knowledge that that life of hers wove itself, at every hour of the day, more closely into his own; and yet that when the moment came that she should know him for her father's slayer, the warp and woof of the fabric must be rent asunder, at what cost to either who could guess? For Love has no more business in a heart choked with sensuality and sin than blush-rose and honeysuckle in a garden choked by an undergrowth of poisonous weeds.

Why was it this Oliver felt glad that this first seal was safe against reopening? Because, wishing that the letter should seem to be despatched, but also that none of her people should know Lucinda's whereabouts, he had hit upon a device to attain both ends. Having secured the letter under pretext that he would seal it elsewhere, he had borne it away out of sight, and quickly finding that nothing written within the covering sheet would tell where it had been written, had removed all the letter itself, substituting a like number of blank sheets, and had then carried it back to its unsuspecting writer to be sealed and sent. Wherefore he felt at ease that her father's death was likely to remain unknown to Lucinda for a long time to come, although in the end it must needs be known. But that might be far off yet.

## CHAPTER VI

THE young undergroom, who had accompanied the party from Croxley Hall, rode back two days later, taking with him the packhorses laden with sundry goods Sir Oliver desired to send there, and leaving Lucinda's wardrobe; for the carriage of which on her return other horses would be purchased, such useful beasts being cheap in this district, but very easy to sell at a good price near Sir Oliver's home. There had been no man at Kips Manor on their arrival, the old gardener having fallen ill, and gone to live at his daughter's, five miles away, where the air was good for rheumatism. In fact, there was no one at all in the house but the old woman, Martha Hatsell, and a girl Elspeth, who did what rough work there was; there being indeed but little in the way of scouring and cleaning to be done, owing to the freedom from dust and dirt, for both were nearly unknown. This girl left in the course of a day or two, to give help at the farm of Dame Hatsell's son-in-law, some seven miles off, as a substitute for the old woman's daughter, Susan Trant, whom Sir Oliver had spoken of when he said Lucinda should be at no loss for a tirewoman. Susan was not so attached to her life with this yeoman farmer as to scruple at any time to come away from home to help in the household of Kips Manor when Sir Oliver came on a visit. She had been a beauty, as a girl; so at least thought Lucinda, as she watched the face mirrored above her own during her time of hair-dressing. She guessed its age at about thirty-six.

"Has your mother always been so deaf as now?" Thus Lucinda one day to this Susan, just to make talk, as she sat and enjoyed the combing of her own great length of rich black hair before the mirror, noting idly that the hand that holds the comb is not unlike her own, some allowance being made for age and rougher use in life.

"Yes, my lady! Ever as deaf as now."

"From childhood?"

"She hath told me so herself."

"And how should you know otherwise, Susan Trant? How indeed? But your mother is not deaf alike throughout the day. She heard my words yesterday, though I had not raised my voice."

"Somewhiles that is so, my lady. Was this in early morning?"

"Indeed no!—and yet, for a very great exactness, yes! It was after midnight, by the clock, when Sir Oliver and I came in last night. And that was early morning of to-day. But for the true sense of your question, I take the answer to be—no!"

"I meant that, my lady. Mother hears at her best in the hours of the real morning, that come after sleep. Otherwhile, she may be stone-deaf but for a chance."

"It was such a chance last night, then. How else came she to hear my words to Sir Oliver?"

"Is your ladyship sure?"

"Most certain!" Lucinda turned her head about to tell it. "I said to Sir Oliver, at the stair-foot, as we lighted tapers for bed, that I would swear that John Rackham had spared himself a ride in the rain three weeks since, and had never carried the letter to meet the



post-cart. Then, as Sir Oliver went upstairs, your mother turns to me, saying Mr. Rackham would be *main sure* to see the letter had its best chance, for think how my ladyship's father must be longing for a letter!" For Lucinda's wording would often note little oddments of country-speech, or passing catchwords of the villagers, whenever she had to repeat what they had said.

Then she, not sorry to talk of her father, though only to her tirewoman, made more of a tale of the matter than any need was. "So I made inquiry of your mother what Mr. Rackham had said touching the letter, and she made answer that she had but now used his own words to me. But he had said, too, that my father and I were a rare father and daughter, and he for his part would carry the letter as far as he might; then if it reached not, *he* would not be the one to blame. I said to your mother then, that John Rackham was an honest man. Did she not think so herself? But on a sudden it seemed she heard not my words, and I had to shout. Even then she caught not all I said, to my thinking, and answered wide of the mark."

To which Mrs. Trant said, combing always, that that was the way with her mother, whose hearing would come by starts, and be gone! But that was so with all deaf folk, to the best of her knowledge and belief, though there might be wiser folk than she, she being no book-scholar. Then Lucinda said there needed no bookish reading to tell this much, that deafness might be hard and fast, and never vary. For see how old Dr. Phinehas, whom she had known from childhood, could hear naught except to put up his hand to listen; and never missed to do so, having finished speaking, as he must have done had his hearing ever come back, even for a moment. To



which Mrs. Trant answered in an odd little phrase, "That, my lady!" meaning thereby, was that so, not as a question, but as an assent.

All this household called its mistress my lady without grudging, either because of a belief that she was truly the wife of Sir Oliver, or because some like experience in former years had taught discretion. How should any member of it know one Lady Raydon from another, or be so daring as dub a new one mere *madam* on the strength of a memory of eight months past?—or be able to swear to a new face and hands; while, as for figure, is not a figure a dress? Sir Oliver knew best who was Lady Raydon; or, at least, could make the man who gainsaid him pay the penalty of his speech. It was otherwise at the Leasowes—that was the New Hall's old name—where all the servants had lived three years or more in the house in the days of its lawful mistress, and each grudged her style and title to a substitute. Now Kips Manor had always been a strange unknown land to this lady, whither she had resolutely refused to accompany her husband, seeing that it was near the sea, and it had never been a practice in her family to dwell near the sea. But it had been to break her of this prejudice that such great expense had been incurred in new furnishings and luxuries at the Manor, and these had stood Sir Oliver in good stead for many purposes—that is to say, whenever occasion arose for a quiet retreat after a season of gaiety, or for any reason.

Let it be said at once that Lucinda wondered not a little now and again that Sir Oliver should be contented to dwell so long in this solitude. All the more so that his manner was not that of a man at ease with his surroundings, and finding pleasure in them. Rather, it was

that of a dissatisfied connoisseur, who has paid heavily for some bijouterie or knick-knack, and loves not the sight of it, knowing he was cheated in the purchase. But she accounted to herself for this strange readiness of his to dwell in what he called a damnable wilderness, a God-forsaken hole—though why its having been forsaken of God should make it damnable in his eyes was hard to say—by supposing that it was through his love for her that he endured it. And the more she thought this, the more she praised the place and spoke of her joy in it, thereby to cause him to dwell there longer alone in her society. For *his* was what she coveted in her infatuation, strange to say; or, rather, a thing that would have been strange were it not so common a story—this heart-whole devotion of youth and beauty, and a soul that rises, as it were, above its contamination, to a creature so foul at heart, so sunk in sensuality and selfhood, that it seems a hard task to Faith itself to think no ill of his Maker. Such was Lucinda's blind love for this miserable blotch on the light of Heaven, and so long as he dwelt contented, save and except for free curse and execration—even of the sound of the sea!—she was not the one to say him nay, and seek to go elsewhere.

But no news came of Lucinda's father, nor of any thing or person belonging to her family, and this was a grave disquiet to her. But she bore her burden in silence, saying nothing to Sir Oliver. Still, she was able to say to herself for consolation that no news was good news—as a many have said before and since, and lived to know the falsehood of it. For her idea was that, were anything badly amiss with her father, she would have been sure to get some answer to her letter—indeed, she had supplicated him, if he wrote not himself, at least to

charge some old friend to write in his stead—as, for instance, the Very Reverend the Dean, Amyas Tunstall, her godfather, who knew all their affairs—only that she might know that all went well with him. Little did she think, as she lay miserable in the small hours of the night-time, wondering should she ever again see the Old Hall, and hear her father's voice, that there, within two or three yards of her, had she but known it, was her letter, all but what was written on the sealed wrapper, on which was the direction and the dropped wax. For the sly fox, her deceiver in all things, had put it under lock and key in the black ebony cabinet that held a mass of his own correspondence; mighty little of which was fit, for very shame, to be brought out into open day. And there it lay, as it might be a stray violet in the spring-time, fallen by misadventure in a sunph or cesspit.

She had lain thus one night, brooding over her own life and the way she had flung all her wealth to the winds for the sake of the thing beside her, until between three and four in the morning, and was just becoming drowsy, and her pulse hushing sleepwards, when she was roused with a shock and a start by Sir Oliver's voice exclaiming suddenly beside her: "There is something in the room with us!"

She had been too near sleep to feel sure, seeing the start it gave her, that the words were no dream, but really Sir Oliver's. When she found her own voice, what she said was, "Was it you that spoke?" and then, when he said, but speaking articulately, something quite unintelligible about John Rackham, said further: "You were dreaming, dear! Wake up! Why—the door is locked! What thing should there be in the room with us?"

He replied: "Hold thy peace, silly wench, and listen." And thereupon she listened with a beating heart, but heard nothing.

Then she said: "It was the owl, Oliver. Lie down and sleep." For there was an especial owl, whose hoot was familiar to them, whose rest was in a distant corner of the roof.

He said again as before: "Be still and listen." And then later: "It was no owl. It was that thing John Rackham wots of. Thou knowest, too—a thing with flaps." And then she, seeing he was still half-dreaming—for all he had seemed so wakeful!—took him by the arm and shook him, saying: "Wake up, Oliver mine! Dost thou not know thou art talking nonsense?"

Upon this he seemed to shake off his sleep, saying foolishly: "What did I say—just now?" And she repeated it just as he had said it, laughing at him, or affecting to laugh. For she could not get clear of an eerie feeling that is ever at hand where sleep and waking meet and cross. Then he, coming fully out of his sleep, says clearly, "What it all was I know not now, but it seemed all good faith at the time," and then lay down again to sleep, which she, too, was not sorry to do also, and this time was soon in a sound slumber.

All this is told, not for any place the thing, a trifle in itself, has in this story, but only that those interested in these strange phenomena of sleep should be better able to judge of what followed within two or three hours that same night.

For Lucinda was not left to enjoy to the full the deep sleep that was her due after so long waiting. She was awaked again, as *she* thought, very soon after she closed her eyes, but over two hours certainly, feeling chilled. Of

which the cause was soon found, the coverlid being thrown off, and her bed-fellow gone some time, to judge by the coldness of the bed where he had lain. This was matter for alarm, for might he not have fallen in a fit elsewhere, and so lie helpless? As she listens, she hears that he is close at hand, and moving about—and it is a glad hearing, for she has had no relish for her awakening, so deep was her slumber and so enjoyable, and so little loves she compulsion to be moving about in the cool of the morning. Sir Oliver has gone—this she thinks—either to note down something he would remember, or to refresh some halting memory that had crossed his mind in a wakeful moment. For either of these things would have been like him, and had happened before; and now she can hear him shifting papers at his desk. For it is in this little cabinet, next the bedroom, that Sir Oliver writes despatches to his steward Durrell; not numerous, nor of great length, but often calling for much thought, and giving Sir Oliver provocations to impatience, either from doubt what to write and how, or from defect of writing-gear.

Now Lucinda, hearing the rustle of papers, and knowing John Rackham was to ride in the very early morning of that day to catch the postal carrier at the Cobbler with Two Wives, seven miles away, settled it in her mind that Sir Oliver had desired to correct some instruction to Durrell, and had feared he might be pressed for time, or cause John Rackham to miss the post; so had decided to alter his letter straightway, as there was already ample daylight in his writing-room, although the bedroom windows, where she was, were darkened. So she would not meddle with him, or disturb him, but having first made good the derangement of the coverlid, she turns over to sleep again, taking his return presently for



granted. Yet not so sound but she can still catch the move of the writing-paper in the next room.

Then, this being prolonged a great while, and sleep checked by starts from the sound of it, she at last calls to him aloud: "Oliver!—art thou writing a book, good man?" But no answer comes, and a sudden fear she cannot understand is on her. She must know what this means, and, rising, steals to the door and peeps in at the writer.

There sits Sir Oliver, in his flowered dressing-robe, to all seeming busy with a letter. She, calling to mind a thing that made a chance word easy—namely, that he had complained, but the night before, of want of ink—says to him: "So you have found the ink, sweetheart!" But no answer comes, only the scratching of the pen.

She, in a sort of alarm, steals in, and goes close beside him, looking over his shoulder. But this is some new distraction, and her heart goes quick over it. For never a drop of ink is in his pen, as it travels on the paper, and though the writer may dip it in the inkpot, it is a dry errand he sends it on. But he still goes on, heeding nothing, and seems unconscious of the woman standing at his shoulder, all in an apprehension of she knows not what.

Then she finds her voice. "Oliver, dearest love, thou art doing nothing. Thy pen is dry! What a craze is this, for this hour in the morning! Come back to bed." But he still writes on, and she was too frightened to waken him roughly, for fear it might harm him.

For she could see now, very plain, that this was a state of sleep-walking, a thing all know and talk of, but few see; and fortunately, for no sleep-walker can be left safely to himself, lest he do himself some mischief;



neither can he be with safety abruptly awakened, the shock of awakening being often unsettling to the reason. So Lucinda, who had heard speak of this thing, yet never seen it, dared not attempt to rouse Sir Oliver, but stepped back from him, watching him well, yet keeping out of close touch with him, not to guide or affect him in any way. In which, to our thinking, she acted most judiciously.

After a very little, though to her it was longer, he seemed to mutter to himself, though what he said she could only guess at. But she was deceived by it into fancying he must be awake, and forgot her better judgment, catching him by the arm, and thinking to assure him of her presence. But no!—he was still sound asleep, though his eyes stood open, and the way they saw nothing, and she could know of it, brought a chill to her heart, and tried her courage sorely. Yet she dared not call aloud for help, even could she have thought of anyone of the household whose presence would have been welcome. So she could only wait to see what he would do next.

As for what he said or muttered, it was just incoherency, so far as her hearing of it went. He seemed to be speaking of some man, God knows whom, who had turned against him. "This is an obstinate fellow, but I will have him down yet!" And then presently: "What a mercy dost thou, man, to cry out against me! Bully-boy, bully-boy, lower thy point, and down upon thy marrowbones!"—and other like rubbish, to which she could attach no more meaning than to his other formless mumblings as he woke from his deeper sleep. There was more of it, meaning nothing, until at last he spoke out quite plainly, saying, "He were best keep his own coun-

sel, this man," and then of a sudden his proper speech came back to him, most easy to distinguish from his sleep-ridden gibberish, and a boon to her to hear. And as she looked in his eyes, the cloud went off them, and they moved again naturally.

"What is all this pother? What dost thou here, Mistress Lucy? This is not thy place. Get thee back to bed, wench!—and make an end of it." To which she answered, "Gladly—for my part!" and was returning to the bedroom—thinking it safest to thwart him in nothing—when he called after her harshly: "What am I doing here? How came I here? Answer me that!" But then, before she could reply, he caught her up with, "Get thee gone, mistress—and no more words!" Whereupon she, trembling alike with cold and terror, got back to bed.

She heard Sir Oliver making some noise over opening and closing drawers impatiently, then that he thrust papers away into them, locking them in with a snap. Then comes he back to bed, not over-thoughtful on her behalf, nor caring a straw that he should run the risk of waking her again for no cause. She heard him say some words, seeming of little coherency, but this she put down to her own failing senses, for sleep was coming apace to her, and welcome.

## CHAPTER VII

NEXT morning Lucinda was rejoiced to find how light an impression all this disturbance of the night had made on the person who might reasonably have been most affected by it—that is, Sir Oliver himself. For it is hard to reconcile such a suspension of the common rule and order of life with a steadfast continuance of its functions. Yet, except that he broke his fast before he rose from his bed, he gave no sign of suffering from any unusual perturbation, either mental or physical. Whereas Lucinda felt all weary and stiff, and almost as though she had been beaten with rods, and her eyes sore and heavy-lidded. For which her remedy was to get out as soon as might be into the sunshine and sweet warm air, leaving breakfast to wait till she should have shaken off the memory of so many sleepless hours of waking nightmare. Till that was done, how should she think of food? Still, she could take a little cup of coffee, made as in Turkey; for in those days the practice of making coffee with much milk, as now, was not yet common. And tea was a rarity, especially now that there was war with Holland, and no trade with the Dutch, who had brought the leaf first to England, some three or four years since.

It was no surprise to her to find on her return that Sir Oliver was still abed, having eaten well; for this was no uncommon occurrence that he should, simply from an idle indulgence of laziness, lie sluggard-wise till near mid-day, now, and then bidding Lucinda play some tune on a

clavichord that stood in his apartment adjoining. For he had a pretty taste in music, though himself but a poor proficient in execution. And he would have her do so now, asking a tune he knew by the name of "Joan in the Cherry-Orchard"—a merry tune. But Lucinda would not indulge this lazy whim, and his mere sloth.

"Thou idle loon!" said she, and he only laughed when her speech was so plain with him. "Why, sweetheart, Oliver mine, what ails thee to lie simmering there in the sheets, letting the day spoil? For shame, thou foolish man! Get thee up, and come out in the sunshine, and see the great fisher-fleet that is out on the waters." But then her mind misgave her that the night's disturbance had left him ill, and she said her thought, asking him anxiously how he fared. But he made light of the matter, saying he had many a time walked in his sleep as a boy, and never been a penny the worse. But what was this tale of hers of a great fisher-fleet? Then says she, "Come out and see for yourself, Master Lie-abed," and is off to seek breakfast, for a bell had rung below as they were talking.

But when she, being ready to go out again, went to seek for Sir Oliver, he was no longer in his room; and Mrs. Trant and her mother were busying themselves over making beds and setting things in order for the day, and they were very sure he had gone up on the roof, having taken his spy-glass and walked away down the long gallery, which only led thither. It was a foursquare open gallery or gazebo, with a wooden rail, topping a gable that rose in the centre well above the surrounding roofs, and giving a fine view seawards. There he stood when Lucinda found him, spying through his glass, which he held against a little flagstaff at the corner.

"Are they not easy to see, Oliver mine—the fisher-boats beyond the bay?"

"None so easy, Mistress Lucy! *I* can see none, look as *I* may. Thine eyes are cleverer than mine to see fishing-boats on yonder sea. If there be any, better for them to be ashore as fast as may be. So say *I*, and so wilt thou say soon." Now this made Lucinda look again, and then she saw that what she had thought fisher-boats were, in nearer sight, great ships with canvas spread and hulls rising high above the sea, story on story.

"What do they do here, to come so near the coast?" Sir Oliver spoke to himself, but then afterwards he spoke to Lucinda, answering a question: "What are they, wench? Why, *I* take it they be the Dutch fleet, under Admiral de Ruyter. That big one in the middle may well be his flagship. Why do they come to these parts? That *I* know not, but Haarlem is but a two days' sail with a fair wind, and so far as *I* know there be none strong enough to hinder them, now there is no Admiral Blake."

"Oh, see, Oliver—see how the white sails flap in the wind and fall! How beautiful she is in the sunlight! But there is no wind, and the sea is glass."

That year (1665) was the beginning of the second war between England and Holland, and at the time of this story either had been for a long time building up a fleet, each in hope to drive the other permanently off the seas; for nations could be fools then as now, even as samples from them, chosen now, may be fools as great as any among them then. But these two fleets were both kept in port for some reason which he who cares for the reading of History may find for himself, until May of that year, when the English Admiral, the Duke of York, the brother of King Charles, hoisted his flag in the Channel. The

Dutch were not so forward, or awaited the return of their Admiral de Ruyter from the Mediterranean. Who, however, came not. Therefore, this fleet, under Admiral Opdam, had delayed taking the sea some two months, and no doubt his ship was the one seen by Sir Oliver and Lucinda from the roof-top.

And Lucinda thought many a time long after, and would tell it to young children in her old age, how sweet that great ship had looked as she lay on the water, motionless for the dead calm; how sweet some sort of bugles, blown for signalling, were across the sea, when a little wind set inwards to the coast, and let the music come, too. And how the roll of certain drums that rose and fell with the wind, and seemed in all the ships, had threat or terror in it, though she knew not fully why till after. And it was sweet, too, to hear, as might be heard for all the distance was so great, the long sweep of oars that struck the water in certain boats that went from ship to ship. Concerning which boats, Sir Oliver said, they were carrying officers to and fro to take instruction from the Admiral. But it may be he knew not.

In his own time Sir Oliver surrendered the spy-glass, that Lucinda might try her luck at seeing. But the sight-hole had a trick of closing, and Lucinda was never sure whether she saw anything or not. But she thought she saw a ship once, only she had to look outside to see which. So in the end she gave the glass back to Sir Oliver.

Presently says he, looking through it: "I thought as much." But just as if he thought aloud, and his hearer was not worth the making out a further tale to. And then: "Use thine eyes, fairest Lucy, and look beyond the ships, and say what thou seest." Whereupon she, straining her eyes into the distance, sees the offing of the



blue sea beyond dotted with yet more white sails, and yet more. Then she, going nearer to Sir Oliver that her arm may be about his neck, says, a little in fear and much in wonder: "What is it all, Oliver dearest? Do tell me what you know."

"Thus much I know, sweet Lucy, that the ships nearest us are Dutch. And thus much I suspect, that the others out beyond are our own fleet. And thus much I believe, that every man aboard them, one as much as the other, is praying for a breeze that he may be brought within gunshot of his enemy."

"Oh, merciful Heaven! Pray rather, pray with me, that the wind may grow even less than now, and that they may be kept apart, despite their wicked prayers!"

"Thou silly chit! Shall there be no more glory of war and battles, to please a silly chit? But I can tell thee a thing will change thy note, Mistress Lucy; so pay attention to what I say. I was in two minds, till I caught sight of yonder fleet on the offing . . . ay, I am pretty sure it is English—for I can make out a flag . . . I was in two minds if it would not be wisest to pack off straight way, before a boat's crew or two of Dutchmen should come ashore for plunder. This house would not be amiss to sack. That might well have been, but now it will not."

"How can you say for certain? Shall we not make ready to start, should we see the boats on the way?"

"Aha—my mistress!—what did I say? Now shall we rejoice together for the coming of the British fleet, and pray for the wind to hasten it hither? Say farewell to thy prayers for a calm sea, and listen for the guns!"

"I would rather a thousand times this house were

sacked and we should fly than that all these men God made should turn to and slay each other in my sight. And so wouldst thou, sweet Oliver mine, for thy heart is surely good, for all thy conceits and phantasies that none believes in."

"Faith, I know not if my heart be bad or good. But I do know that I bought not this house for any Dutchmen, but only for myself. Were it thy house, silly Lucy, wouldst be so ready to hand it over to pillage? To my thought, scarcely! And as for these men that will slay each other shortly, I know not whether they were made by God or by the Devil. In any case, they will fight, lest they be flung dead in the sea or alive in a foreign prison. . . . Is it not nearly time for meat?" But there was still the best part of an hour, and Lucinda, though she felt sick with dread of what might come, was in no humour yet to leave the sight of the beautiful ships, now especially that the sailors were spreading out upon the yards, unreefing every sail and setting it to catch the first wind that should come. And each new sail that they spread seemed whiter in the sun than the last.

Then it began to be clear that the further fleet was nearing the other steadily, but slowly. The ships were, as the phrase is, bringing the wind with them. This does not mean that the wind and ship are travelling at the same rate, but only that the ship is moving athwart the wind, as the area of wind increases sideways. So that a ship that awaits the wind may also await a ship. And it may come slow or quick, as the wind spreads.

This fleet was coming slowly, but surely. And the Dutchmen had no choice but to wait the pleasure of the breeze.

Now, though the hour was close at hand for the mid-

day meal, there seemed every chance it would be delayed. For all the household had been out watching this sight upon the sea, and each member of it neglecting his or her work to do so. But an end came to these delays, and Sir Oliver and Lucinda were summoned by a customary bell, now near an hour late. He, for his part, was not pleased to leave watching the ships, yet neither would he have been pleased had his food been brought to him in the gallery he watched them from. He was morose and silent at table, while Lucinda did what she might to make him less so, with little or no success. So the meal passed almost in silence, for Susan Trant, who attended at table, responded but little to such chance words as her mistress addressed to her, she being either too respectful or too scant of language to converse freely.

Her own lost hours of the night before were beginning to tell on Lucinda, and a drowsiness was taking slow possession of her that taxed all her resolves to keep clear of the gates of sleep. So strong was it that even as she sat at table her head must needs nod and her eyes close, and the world slip from her by fits and starts, leaving her on the threshold of oblivion.

“God in Heaven!—what was that?” The words were Lucinda’s as she started to her feet, broad awake. Sir Oliver was on his feet.

“Already!” he cried. “Why, how the Devil? . . .” He left his words unfinished, and ran for the stairway to the roof.

Lucinda had barely time to gasp again, “What was it?—oh, what?” to see the woman Trant run, mad with terror, beating her hands together, tearing her hair—

crying aloud, "O God, have mercy! God have mercy!"—when it came again, and yet again. And the windows shook and rattled with the crash upon crash, and the birds that lived in the ivy without were all in panic, and the great bloodhounds in the court bayed a deep response to each new word of terror as it came across the water. For Hell had broken loose without, in what had been the sweet silence of the morning, and the voice that had startled Lucinda from her momentary sleep had come from the throat of a gun.

Then she ran, as well as she could run, for terror of what she might see; and although she felt the while she should have liked to hide her head and die, she felt, too, that she would be best beside the man she loved. He could bear it—true! But was he not a man? And were not the world and its ways, its gains and its glories—and its women—for men?

He was there before her, in the little gallery upon the roof, and his eye was at the glass, looking out seaward. "God's wounds; don't shake so, wench!" was what he said when she laid a timid hand upon him to help her strength from his.

What she said was, "Thank God!—they have stopped." For the smoke of the guns fired was drifting away across the bay, and a lull had come for a moment.

"Not they!" said Sir Oliver, watching still through his glass. But still Lucinda had courage in her to hope that he was wrong—for a moment.

Only for a moment! For a flash came sharp from the great ship in the centre of the new fleet, and sharp upon the heels of it another, and another, and yet another, before the sound could reach them of the first. And then it came. But even before the next had time to follow—

and none gave its fore-runner's echoes time to die—Lucinda had time to think of the man the shot struck, and the wife, maybe, that thought him living still. Could she but have known the thing she herself was ignorant of—the tale of the man slain by the arm she held but now! At least, the murderer that put the linstock to yonder gun had never eaten with the man it slew, nor touched his hand in friendship.

Truly, Lucinda was no more fit for a world where slaughter is thought so light of than the woman who wept that our Lord Christ was not born before the world was made, to stay for pity's sake the handiwork of His Father. For when the great thunder came that made these first shots seem as nothing, the stunning intolerable roar of broadside on broadside, in which no one gun's voice spoke alone, but was lost in the Devil's chorus of its fellows; when all the ships of either fleet were hidden in an evil cloud of smoke, with evil flashes in the heart of it; when strange new sounds were bred in the pauses of a moment that even now came from time to time—sounds of splintering timber or the rattle of small arms—then Lucinda, though she stood spell-bound at first, must in the end give way, and run and hide her head in her pillow, and stop her ears, as she used to do when a child, that she might not hear the cries of her brother when his tutor beat him for his slowness at his tasks. But it was of no avail now, for in the murmur of her ears, as her fingers pressed them, she could hear the muffled thud of every gun sound; and she had no courage in her to slacken the pressure of her fingers, but rather sought in terror to make it closer still, and this even though her finger-nails, however duly trimmed, must needs cut and give pain within the ear they could not

shield from the sound without. But in truth this suffocated clamour of the battle was in her pillow and in the timbers of the house—nay! in the very earth itself, that had it from the sea. And no ear escaped it, and none but a babe could hear it and be deaf to the truth of its boasted messages of death. For not a gun was fired that day (nor is in any battle) but had it in its heart to do murder, and a Devil's confidence in its success.

He who reads this may know that one who falls asleep in any steady continuity of sound may easily awaken suddenly if this sound is suddenly checked, and will most likely do so to a certainty if a new sound unlike it come instead. Thus it was with Lucinda, who for all the horror of the gun-thuds in her ears, mixing with the throbbing of her heart, could not find it in her to say nay to oblivion when it came hand-in-hand with sleep. Indeed, it would have been wonderful had she not slept, seeing how great had been the stress of her wakefulness the night before in the proper hours of sleep. So, when she huddled down and crouched, as it were, into her pillow to shut out only a little more of the intolerable sound, a welcome sleep came on her unawares, and the monotonous persistence of the guns, from an evil, became a lullaby, and she slept on, still deeper and deeper. Until, well on towards sundown, there came a change and a great lull. Then slow, intermittent, dropping fire of guns large and small. Then a sense of greater distance, to Lucinda's ears, in the sounds that remained.

For when that lull came at last she moved uneasily, as though towards awakening; and then, when sudden voices near at hand grew loud, as of exultation, and above all the voice of Sir Oliver making great laughter



and rejoicing, she started up from her sleep broad awake, crying out: "What is this—where am I?" And then, casting about to find the story of it, presently remembered all, and dreaded to go up to her lover on the roof for pure fear of what she might hear had come about while she lay sleeping.

But that is soon settled for her. For the servant, Susan Trant, coming a-tiptoe to see if her mistress were awake, or like to be, finds her moving, and calls out to her master above, that he may know. Whereupon he, coming quickly down the stairway or ladder that led to the roof, runs to her room with great acclamation and rejoicing, calling out to her what a grievous miss she has had of a great and glorious sight!

To all which she only says: "I pray God neither hath had the better!" And he replies: "Thou art a silly fool, Lucy! 'Tis a victory for his blessed Majesty, King Charles. And if his gallant Admiral be not carrion already, there will be a coronet for him and a fat endowment thereto. Maybe, though, the fish are sharing him!—even now!"

"Oh, Oliver mine! how can you be so horrible? For God's love, stint in such horrible talk! But thou dost not mean it, dear love! 'Tis only that thou knowest not of slaughter, and all thy dream is of stage-play that means nothing." For Lucinda had in her heart the thought of the smooth ship's decks all slippery with blood, and the corners where men, wounded to the death past hope, had crawled to die. For she had seen at Tilbury Fort a ship such as these largest were, out on the water yonder.

But Oliver winced at her words, as well he might, even had the last blood he shed not been her father's. But

he made believe to laugh—ho, ho! “Come along, mistress,” said he, “and see the Lord High Admiral of the States General, and what our gunners have brought him to! Faith, I have seen a sight this day that, had I missed it, would have left me sorrowing. Come along, wench! No more talk!”

Then Lucinda goes with him, if it must be so, and shudders to look out seaward. And well is she justified in her fear. For what sees she next on the water where the ships of either fleet, so few hours since, were afloat in all their bravery of white sail and flowing pennon? English are they, or Dutch, those scattered, shattered hulks, half-hidden in the smoke of their own conflagration, through which she scarcely can distinguish, gaze as she may, their fellows out beyond, now making for the offing, pursuers and pursued?

But Sir Oliver would have her look at one, the largest, and rejoice with him at her plight. “Oho, Lucy mine!” quoth he. “Where is he now, your swan-bird on the water? Dost thou know him again, silly lass?” And Lucinda gave a cry of pain to see how sorely the battle had maimed her sweet ship of the morning, lying mastless in a cloud of smoke fed by some burning fire in her own heart. For it was vomiting black vapour out, thick but flameless, from two or three low-lying ports amidships. And a party of the crew, who looked but spots as they climbed over a great cumber of fallen mast afloat against the bulwarks, must have had a sore time of it with this smoke. At which Sir Oliver saw cause to be mightily amused. “They think to cut free,” said he, “but some of them will choke first, I warrant.”

Then Lucinda, all pity for these few she might see saved, and keen with interest awakened, watched for

them, as the smoke-blast wavered for a moment, plying axes and hand-saws to clear the entangled wreck. And one indomitable man she could make out who hung working to the rigging almost in the very smoke itself. Whom she so loved for his valour that she would have Sir Oliver tell her how this man prospered in his work, noting it through his spy-glass that made it plain to be seen by him, though she herself saw dimly.

"I can see the knave," said he, with his eye at the lens. "He is bare to the waist, and strong as a bull. But he won't do it—he won't do it!" Sir Oliver chuckled. "Ho, ho! There goes his chopper now—now—now! See the chips fly as he strikes! But . . . . ho, ho! . . . the smoke is too hard on him. *He* won't do it!"

"Oh, but keep the glass on him, Oliver sweet, and tell me how comes it he gives not up—choking, poor fellow!"

"Not yet awhile, Lucy lass! For he swings back, and hangs by his legs till the smoke passes, and then to it again! But he won't do it!"

"Oh, but if he might, and I might know it!" And then, indeed, one could have thought her prayer had been heard, for a dim cheering came from the distance, and then the seamen on the wreck were climbing up the bulwarks above them, and the mast and wreckage seemed to float free. But the smoke poured thick from the ports, never slacking. Then Lucinda heard again the sweet bugle-sound, as she had heard it in the still morning.

Just what happened it was hard to see, and the causes of it harder still. This, however, was sure, that the great ship, free of the wreck, swung slowly round so that the smoking ports were hidden out of sight, and the whole ship clearer to be seen. Then, too, could Lucinda see

certain boats with oarsmen, but packed full of others abaft; and even in the bows, so that they were weighted almost to danger point. And these boats were creeping slowly, slowly towards the great ship; nearer and nearer, as she, now unencumbered by wreckage, though too inert upon the water to answer to her rudder, floated, a listless hulk, to await their coming.

“O the luck of it!” shouted Sir Oliver joyously. “To see it all and miss none! And all the smoke clean gone! Which wilt thou wager on, Mistress Lucy? Our men or the Dutchmen?”

But Lucinda clapped her hands on her heart. “O God, have mercy!” she cries. “I see you mean they will fight. Oh, Heaven avert it! I had but thought they were coming to give help.”

Then Sir Oliver laughed poisonously; but the girl could not see he was a devil, because she loved him, as is the way with women. And his answer was: “Help enough! Help to put the fire out, and get what’s left of the ship to Plymouth port, or where not, to share prize money on. But they’ll have to pay toll to the Dutchmen, if I see right, in blood or broken bones.” For his eye was at the telescope.

Then Lucinda would have run, as she did before. But Sir Oliver shouts to her to come back, in a harsh voice. “Don’t be a fool, girl; come you back! I should have thought thou wert a woman by now.” But though she obeyed him, she gasped and shuddered at what was to come. And it was an ill business for a woman with a tender heart to watch, even from afar. For though the burst of cheering, as the boat’s crews, with a terrible determination, stormed the sides of the helpless ship, had in it what stirred for a moment a sympathy in Lucinda’s

heart; yet when the sound of cheering gave place to what she knew were broken cries of agony, and rage, and curses, she went utterly sick at heart, and prayed that she might die. But none the less must she remain spell-bound, while the horror is enacted before her eyes; while her lover, exultant in his glee, exclaims aloud on all he sees, that she too may know the glory of war, and have done with her puling terrors.

“Have an eye for the man with the hatchet!” shouts he in his excitement, forgetting that she has no spy-glass, as he has. “He’ll make some play for us, that fellow will—damn him!” And then presently: “I have him now—I have him! . . . he’s down, but he’s up again! . . . he’s met his match though, this time. . . . No—he hasn’t! . . . Yes!—he has. . . . By God, they’re at the grips for it . . . have at the throat of him, boy, have at the throat! . . . ’ware the open gangway, ye stark fools . . . ’tis bad alike for both . . . *there* ye go—over—over—over!” . . .

“Oh, Oliver!—where are they?”

“Gone to feed the fishes, chuck, I take it.”

Then Lucinda, faint and fainter in her despair, saw but dimly how the British crew, beaten back and beaten back, were in the end triumphant and swarming over the gunwale of the great ship. Nor did she note at all how in the lessening light—for time had run quick, and the day had waned—the dead-light ports showing more and more a lurid glare of untamed fire below the decks. Nor how the crippled British man-of-war the crews had left was settling down upon the water, and would surely soon go under.

For in that very moment of the boarders’ triumph the creeping fires below reached the powder magazines. And

the last image on her eyes was of a great flame shooting straight up, to all seeming from the very bowels of the vessel; from which, as from a centre radiating upwards and outwards, expanding on every hand and covering all upon the sea, came ridge on ridge and fold on fold of vapour, black, white, and flaming, casting forth beyond its vortex of destruction shattered fragments of what had been the ship, and what one shuddered to think had been the living bodies of its crew.

For such time as her heart could beat in, her tongue feel for speech to ask what was it that had happened, this image was an image and no more. And then the world shook, and the house shook, and the air was full of cries and the sound of shivered glass—for not a window-pane towards the sea but was broken—and the awful crash had come that was the answer to the question she would have asked, and found no voice for.

All the world, and the sunset light, and the image of her lover as he turned and spoke, swam in her failing vision. She just heard Sir Oliver's words, "A brave finish! No more to-night!" and then, as he shut his telescope, she fell like a stone, and knew no more.



## CHAPTER VIII

TRULY all hearts should be of a tenderness for those of this world who have to live in it to be able to bear its cruelties alike. Or at the worst there should be none so great a difference betwixt any two of us as now, when what seems but a passing jest to one may wrench the soul of his neighbour near to death; when the ear of one may hear but a stave of merry music in what sounds Hell's discord to another, and when the cramping of the rack wrests a cry of pain from one unwillingly compelled to see its victim's torture; while another, glutted with the sweet sight, greets the sounds with the chuckle of a Devil.

In Sir Oliver's world there should have been no heart more callous to a fellow-creature's agony than must needs be where the butcher has perforce to slay the lamb—nay, where its Maker has in His Divine Wisdom ordained that none shall live except at the price of his mother's torment. In such a world it goes hard with those who are disquieted by every manly sport; to whom the sound of the sportsman's gun tells of the stricken bird escaping with a broken wing, that wonders why it cannot fly, and looks for its mate in vain; who pray that the happy fish, deep in the still cool water, may be shrewd enough to bilk the angler, and send him supperless to bed. To such as these the thought that all suffering has been wisely ordained brings little ease of heart, and the reflection that all things are the result of an inevitable Divine Law is of small comfort, in the minds of many even causing ques-

tion of the Omnipotence of the Lawgiver, or of His solicitude for His creatures.

But Lucinda was not among those who would push their puny indictments to the throne of the Most High, and sit in judgment on Him by the light of the reasoning He Himself created. She bore the pain she knew must be, at the sight of the ruined plumage of the blood-stained bird, the sodden glitter of the murdered fish, but spoke no blame of rod or gun, only holding him the truest sportsman who kills outright; and that he who will not leave his fish to gasp to death in the sun, for mercy and tenderness of heart, is neither the worsè angler nor the greater fool thereby. But for these men that had slain each other in their valour but now, the voice of their blood was going up to Heaven from the sea that had engulfed them, as the voice of Abel went up from the ground; and, for her, the brand of Cain was on every man of them, or his memory.

So it fell out now on the morning after this great battle of Solebay, as its name is, that Lucinda shrank from the seashore where it had but yesterday been a joy to her to walk, for sheer dread of looking out on the waters where the fight had been; and this, however Oliver might mock at her, saying there was never a sail now left in sight, though one should scour the whole offing in search of one. But she must listen to his bidding, for had he not risen early that he might walk out along the beach with her to see what of jettison or castaway had drifted shoreward, as might well be, or even the body of some drowned seaman or marine. But he spoke nothing of such a possibility to Lucinda, having already much ado to persuade her to his will, she praying always to be allowed to remain within doors, until the very sun in Heaven that

had shone on the evil deeds of yesterday should cease to be a horror to her, and the sweet world become itself again.

Now this desire that Lucinda should never be absent from his side seems to us the one green shrub in the arid desert of a wicked soul; its one redemption, that may by God's grace yet stand between it and its final fall into the black gulf that yawns for him who of his own evil will becomes a Devil outright. Let those beware, who, being misled by words, would tear asunder sinners each of whom has but one nourishment for good, the love each bears the other; and substitute for it the fruitless bitterness of Repentance.

But this is a tale, not a homily; and it dwells upon Oliver's actual Love for Lucinda's self, apart from such impulses as Man shares with goat and monkey—and there was little taint of either now in the continuous memory he carried with him of her sweet, soft dark eyes, her sweet, soft dark hair, and the feel of it—because it is a solace to thought to dream of any seed in such a soul that may grow, in the æons, to be other than a tree of Damnation. Measure this man's crime against that of fighting men who slay their kind at the bidding of a War Lord, who half persuade themselves their act is right; and then say if it is not well this little spark of light should live and grow. It has the better chance that even now it is a shrewd discomfort to him to think that could she know whose sword pierced her father, he might have to give her up before he should be well weary of her, and ready to cast her away.

Therefore, when he rose early to wander out along the coast, hoping that the relics of the fray might not all have been swept away by the tide, he would not be content

except Lucinda put aside her hatred of the memories of yesterday, and came in his company to make him merry. And he bade her leave her sour looks at home for the next grey sky she should awaken to, and not waste them on so fair a dawning. For the sun shone as joyously for three hours past, when they came again to the shore and the little waves that hurried on to kiss it and die, as though all the story of slaughter could be forgotten in a night. And the lark was singing in heaven about other things, above the land; while the sea-bird's cry said never a word of the blood that had defiled its waters. Had it not been for the masts of a sunken ship well out to sea near where she had been afloat in all her pride the evening before, all the stretch of ocean would have been bare beneath the blue, dappled a little overhead with serried cloudlets spanning half its vault, telling rather of wind to come than rain.

But Lucinda's eyes, sore with tears, could scarcely bear the dazzle of the light, and the flashing whiteness of the foam, with its millions of diamonds in the sun, that would at another time have filled her heart with joy. How dared the world be so resplendent with the glory of a day, so hard upon the heels of one that had made her soul in its despair cry out alone for the solitude of mourning, and for silence? But for Sir Oliver, he was in high glee at the end of the fray, and in no concern for the dead or wounded, even of his own countrymen. "Where be the knaves and their noise now, my Lucy?" said he. ". . . Where be they? . . . Why—well on their way to pay a visit to the Thames, those that are not gone on a visit to the fishes."

"Which are the happier, Oliver mine?"

"Of the Dutch, or of the English, wench? Of the

English, I take it those still above water are best off, having prize-money to share and a merry time to spend it in. Of the Dutch I know not, except it be such as have long purses, and can buy their freedom to the benefit of his Majesty's exchequer. For prisoners have but a wearisome time of it, in jail or at work on a chain-gang. Better be a bellyful for a school of dogfish!—if you ask me.”

“Will they release none? Will all go to prison?”

“Those that pay will pack off back, and so might some of the others if there were any captive among the Dutch to exchange for—granting such were sound and fit to serve again. Else they might draw their prize-money to tempt the Dutchmen's greed, or wait for their families to scrape up a meal for it. But the sea gives up none for ransom, be it never so freely paid.”

“Have *you* ever seen a man in a prison, Oliver mine?”

“Of a surety!—and one like to remain a prisoner, many a long year, if he lives to enjoy his irons. And they *do* live, the jail-birds in their cages. I wonder they die not oftener.”

“Was this one in chains? Oh, tell me of him—poor creature!”

“He was a pirate whose time on the high seas, as I take it, had come to an end for good. He was on the far side of a grating, in the within court of the debtor's jail in Southwark—what do they call it?—the Marshalsea. And my friend I went to see there, for curiosity. . . .”

“Was *he*, too, a prisoner?”

“Ay—of a sort. He was a debtor, and a good friend of mine, for he paid me his losses at quadrille, when he might have used his money for a sop to his creditors. But he would not be off a debt of honour, so I went to see

him in jail. . . . Well, I was telling thee, wench, and you must be at your questioning! . . . This Sackvill—that was his name—being merry with wine I had given to drink, must needs thrust at this prisoner with my walking cane, through the bars of his den, to see his mad rage at him, he being all the while in safety, t’other side of a strong grating. But he got little sport of him, for the fellow but opens his eyes and says, ‘Curse thee, ass! Thou hast spoilt me a dream of the sea. . . .’ What’s out yonder?” So spoke Sir Oliver, stopping in his speech to gaze out seawards, and reaching with his hand the while to take from Lucinda his spy-glass, which she had been carrying.

Then she, following his eyes with hers as she handed him the glass, saw something afloat out towards the sunken wreck that was not a boat, yet was altogether still upon the water; seeming to lean and move with a motion of its own, more than would come of the mere chopping of the sea beneath a freshening wind. But she could not see the cause of this movement.

Sir Oliver, taking from her the glass with a slight impatience that she should not have thought to remove the brass cap or lid, looked through it awhile, resting it on the post of a groin or breakwater for steadiness. Lucinda, longing to hear, must wait till he should choose to speak. But he made no great haste to do so, though he must have known well all the time how she was listening for his voice.

“Is that scoundrel John Rackham anywhere in sight?” he said at last, not taking his eye from the telescope. For he had told the groom to follow at an easy distance, to be at hand if needed.

“Oh, Oliver, what have you seen?—what have you



found? . . . Yes, I can see Rackham, on the little bridge. Shall I sign to him?"

But her lord was not minded yet awhile to tell what he saw, but only said, still watching: "Sound twice on my dog-whistle, and disturb me not." Now, the dog-whistle hung loose to his watch-chain; and Lucinda, stooping to take it, followed his bidding, not without fault found that she had shaken him. "Can'st thou not blow a whistle, and not make a pother about it," says he. But truly the girl's hand had been both gentle and skilful, failing only where success seemed almost impossible, the whistle being betwixt Sir Oliver's breast-pocket and the wooden groin.

Now, John Rackham, who would never go afoot except under compulsion, was making use of this attendance on Sir Oliver to finish the breaking in of a young colt that strained at the rein overmuch to be good for a lady's riding. So when the whistle sounded, he could make short work of coming. Then Sir Oliver took his eye from the glass and spoke to him, never caring that Lucinda was waiting on his words; though, of course, she might hear them—that he granted! That she noticed these little slights to herself scarcely at all, or found excuses for them, was a part of her love for him, just as much as her blindness to his greater torts. She was one who gave not her heart by halves.

"Get you off to old Ben Thurkill's, as quick as you may, and find what ails the man that he has not seen yonder fellow left on the wreck. . . . You see him not? The worse for your eyesight, John Rackham! Wake old Ben up if he sleeps; souse a pail of water over him, and make him get his boat out and bring the knave ashore, Dutch or English. Tell him to bring him straight away here, where we sit now—not to his own God-forgotten

midden. Be off sharp, and no words!" On which the groom turned back whither he had come, for there was no bridle road by the beach to the little fisher-village two miles off, the nearest place for a boat; seeing that the inroad of the sea had eaten up the old coast-road, and the new beach had chosen an ill place for the natural growth of a fresh track, and it had been no man's profit to put labour into the making of one. So there would be the best part of half-an-hour to wait before a boat could be despatched to the succour of that lonely survivor, whoever he was, upon the floating wreck.

"Oh, but, Oliver, can you see him? Are you sure? For look as I may, I see no man."

"Look once more, Lucy sharp-eyes, Lucy bat's-eyes! Look once more, and see if you see not a pair of them. for there be two, to my judgment. And either both are Dutch, or both English."

"Now, dearest man, be reasonable. Treat me not like a fool, because I am a woman. How can you tell that both alike are of one nation, and yet not see enough to say which?"

"He would have a pretty wit to tell if a man were Dutch or English, except he could see his clothes, or hear his lingo. And yet I know this, that both are alike, and no sworn enemies, and thou mayst even spend our waiting-time in making a guess why. Guess now, shrewdly!"

"I cannot guess. How should I? Tell me, Oliver." For Lucinda thought, as she knew nothing of Holland, this was something she must be in the dark about.

Sir Oliver, at his glass again, laughed as at a little triumph. "Then I will take pity on thee, Mistress Lucy,

and tell the riddle. Easy enough! You saw the wreck move, but now?"

"While you looked through the glass? As I got the whistle? I saw it."

"That was when the one of them, of whom I see naked shoulders, and no more, helped the other, who seems little better than crippled, to a firm place on the wreckage, himself keeping always in the water beside him. Is it like he would do so if they were enemies?"

"I know not," said Lucinda; and thereat, at the doubt in her voice, Sir Oliver laughed in scorn.

"What!—to fight with a man one hour, and give place to him the next. Why, that fellow yonder could have sent his mate to feed the fishes, and got a good secure hold for himself, any time! Depend on't, he's his senior officer, and there's money in it for him. . . . What's he after, next?" And Sir Oliver remained silent, watching.

Lucinda, also watching, thought she saw something on the water, moving from the wreck and giving back the sunlight, but in the turmoil of the little wave-crests, for the wind was rising, she could not have said if the flashing were not the wing of a gull perched on some drift, and blown by the wind. Her other thought, that it was the white flesh of a swimmer, caught by the light, she put no store by; for why should either man swim away from his place of safety? Yet she was mistaken, for presently Sir Oliver, who had kept all he saw to himself, and what he thought of it, takes a swimmer for granted in his speech, saying: "The rogue will be a fine swimmer if he passes the Scrimbles," and then was silent, intent upon his telescope. Now, "the Scrimbles" was the name given by the folk on that coast to a scour

or current a mile off shore, of no great width, but of a dangerous swiftness; such that fisher-boats, returning to Shelving Creek, where was their usual anchorage, would make for Thorney Point, or Stowe—that is to say, three miles either way, according to the run of the tide—to fetch the Creek with any security. Therefore, Lucinda, hearing that yonder spot out to sea was a living man fighting for his life, could scarcely draw breath for the intentness of her watching him. And every time he vanished, and was not seen again on the instant, she had to choke back a cry, scarcely able to wait for his return.

But Sir Oliver, with more grin on his face than one could set down to the mere twist of an eye at a telescope, was watching the swimmer as the true sportsman watches the coursers and the hare; not quite without a feeling for the one he has no wager on. For this man, afloat there two miles off shore, caught in the sweep of the terrible current, was in his indomitable fight for life making sport for Sir Oliver, and deserved well of him, as the heart-stricken hare that leaves its fur in the fangs of the greyhound deserves well of the dog's owner—who will eat him, when tender for the cook. At one time it seemed the swimmer would have the better of the sea, and touch land over by Stowe Pound, as they call the wall that shows four-square at the lowest tides. And then Lucinda was all triumph on his behalf, seeing that he had swum so well, and would have Oliver promise that this man should be found at Stowe, and made much of, and sent back to his own country with money in his pocket.

Then Sir Oliver, his eye ever at the glass, spoke chuckle-wise, making Lucinda shudder. “One thing I

will promise, fairest Lucy mine," said he: "that if you will find your man at Stowe and bring him alive to the Manor, he shall be fed like a king, and not packed off empty-handed. Further, he shall have a suit of my clothes, seeing he will come ashore bare enough, if he be not too big to get inside them. Wilt thou be happy with that pledge, Lucy mine?" And then he snickered again over it, and Lucinda knew what he meant.

"Oh, Oliver, Oliver! You mean he will not reach the shore! Is there no boat can save him? Will he not be seen from Stowe? Oh, let me go, Oliver, that I may rouse them up. They do not see him—oh, they do not see him!"

"Run, Lucy mine, if you are minded to run. It will take an hour by the road to get speech of them at Stowe. Unless you have a fancy to wade the creek, which you may do in a quarter of an hour less. But your man will be drifted well out to sea by then, if he keep above water at all. Try it, Lucy mine, try it!" Then the girl saw how hopeless was this poor swimmer's case, and hid her face and her tears and her terror, while Sir Oliver, still on the watch to see the very last of him, said now and again, "He's gone! . . . no, there he is still! . . . how the knave fights for his life! . . . *now* he's gone . . . no, he floats on his back. But he'll never reach shore that way, you may swear to that, Lucy!" and so on. However, the end was to come, and presently he clapped to his telescope with "Od's my life!—he's done his best. Come out of thy head-wrap and look round for him, Mistress Lucy—ho, ho!" And Lucinda could love him, strange to say, for all this laugh; for she thought him not in earnest, but making a kind of show, as of manhood, and pardoned what seemed to her an excusable humour

of his, just to plague her for her weakness, and urge her to greater strength. So besotted was she with her blind belief in his real wealth of heart.

“Oh, Oliver, Oliver! I dare not look on the empty sea. I am sick to think of it.”

“Silly wench! As though the sea had never choked a man to death before! Next time you look on it for pleasure, think of all the dead men it hath in keeping, and the bones of 'em all, among the fishes. Now, when are those lazy loons going to turn out with that boat of theirs?” On which he drew out his glass again, turning it the other way of the shore-line, to where he looked for the boat to come. And shortly after, at sight of something, closed it again, saying now we should know if the other fellow were living or dead. Lucinda then, following his sight, saw a small boat pushed off from the land, that lifted merrily on the waves. And then that the two rowers paused to hoist a white sail on the bare mast, that took the wind and sent the little boat ascud across the sparkling sea. So joyous was it in the sunlight as it heeled over to the breeze, she almost found it in her heart to forget death, and think of the sweetness of life alone.

The boat made straight for the wreckage, dropping the sail as it neared; and then the floating timbers hid both boat and rowers, but their movement told of the shifting of the derelict man upon them into the boat. Which being done, the boat came clear of the wreck, and the little sail was up again so quick, hiding those in the boat, that Lucinda had hardly time to see that now it held three men, not two.

“Why do they not come hitherward straight?” she asked. “Has not John Rackham told them?”



"How should they come straight in the eye of the wind, foolish wench? They must make tacks to reach us here. You will see them shift round the sail and turn directly."

"They are not turning, Oliver. Mine eyes have the best of it, for all your telescope. They are heading straight for Stowe. I know—I know! They are on the track of the man that swam. Oh, pray Heaven they find him!"

"They are on a fool's errand, then; only for the chance of giving him Christian burial, if they care for that. However, he is English—that much I know."

"But how?"

"As I told thee; they were of one nation, else had this one not helped the other."

"But both may be Dutch."

"A blessing on thy pretty understanding! If they were Dutch, how should old Thurkill know of the man that swam?"

"It may be the other spoke English."

"No English old Ben would ever be the wiser for! Trust him for that! Besides, the old fox would never go out of his way to pick up a Dutchman. Depend upon it, both of our own side—none of the enemy's."

And so the talk went on as they watched the little white sail fly over the waters, to and fro; for Lucinda was in the right of it, and the boat was searching for a thing hard to find in any sea not flat as a mirror—a dead body just afloat and no more, all but flush with the water. She could see one of the seamen stand as high as he might, to look down upon the sea as the boat lifted. But, as Sir Oliver had said, they had their errand for nothing, though to Lucinda's thought it was

hard they should be called fools for all the pains they were at. Still, she shrank not from him, accounting his roughness but a phase of speech, and no more.

An hour passed, and still they sat watching, while the little boat still shot to and fro, searching the waters near and far. Then, just as Sir Oliver, beginning to be impatient for food, would return to the house—for he was always well disposed for a draught of wine or ale half-an-hour before the midday meal—it looked as though the searchers had wearied of their search, for the boat turned and made straight for where they sat, getting the best of the south-west wind, now freshening off the shore. So they waited there, and Lucinda's heart beat hard to see the man who was saved. If only he were English, as her lover thought, and might tell them the story of the fight, and what man he was whom they had seen drown!

Scattered folk of the sparse fishing population, or cottagers from a little way inland, whom the report had reached of someone saved from the ships, were gathering along the beach by now, waiting for the boat to come ashore from its search. As she came nearer, the sprinkling of spectators, converging to the spot where they thought her surest to touch land, grew to a little crowd, abiding the result in silence, or speaking among themselves; for they knew of the man who had just gone under, and as they lived ever in the presence of death by drowning, as must be where there are fisher-folk, they could not make light of it, as one may who lives far away inland, out of hearing of the sea.

The little boat ran swiftly, well nigh gunwale under as she lurched to the wind, for it freshened still, blowing off shore; then struck her sail close inland, to make way for

the rowers to work their oars again for the few yards still needed to beach her. And so she came in, though in less time she might have run slantwise on to the shingle, had she carried no disabled man. But there was need for thought how this man should be least shaken in the landing of him; and for this the men ashore could lift her easiest and run her up clear of the sea, if she lay straight in at the last.

On which Lucinda, running ahead of Sir Oliver—for the boat made her landing a short half-furlong, at a guess, from where they had been sitting—went close up to the stern, following her as she was half-dragged, half-lifted, out of reach of the rising tide. Then says she to the man left in her, who has slipped down on the loose planking for more steadiness, and lies to all seeming helpless: “God save you, friend! Are you English or Dutch?”

But whether his answer is in English or Dutch she cannot tell, so little voice has he left in him to answer with. But Reuben Thurkill, who was with his father, Ben Thurkill, will answer for him. He’s a New Englander, back from America. He had told them that much on the boat.

Then says his father: “I took him for a Portugal. But thy hearing is better than mine, boy.”

“Is his eyesight hurt, that he has a bandage over his eyes?” Thus Lucinda. And Sir Oliver, coming up, having taken his time, not to show too keen a curiosity about this man, would have had this bandage removed, to see his face the better. But Lucinda besought him against this so earnestly that he gave it up; for it may be he wished to stand well with those dwelling round about, and there were many present. “Have him to

the house, dearest Sir Oliver," said she, "and there I will take it off with mine own hands, so he may come to no harm in the removal of it." And she turned her mind to the recalling of all the remedies she had heard of for injury to the eyes, as the injection of the gum of cedar of Libanus, or a poultice of bramble-leaves boiled in water. For in those days all women prided themselves on their knowledge of simple remedies that came ready to hand; seeing it would often chance no doctor could be found within a day's ride; and there was none such that she had heard spoken of near Kips Manor, few resources of civilisation being within reach now, since the sea swallowed up the township of which it was a suburb in the days of Elizabeth.

But for the moment it was clearly best to leave his face protected by the handkerchief the boatmen had bound it with, and to bear him up to the house as soon as might be. It took but little time—for seafaring folk are quick-handed at such work—to make a litter with a pair of oars and some cross-battens from the flooring of the boat; Sir Oliver promising, as though he would have all see how great was his liberality in so doing, to make good the sail-sheet of good hemp cordage that was cut in short lengths to tie the framework across and across at the angles, spoiling it for all other use. And thereto the sail-canvas was folded to a sort of bed, against the hardness of the battens, and the man placed thereon, seeming near insensible, and borne up to the house on the shoulders of four young men, Lucinda having placed her own light scarf to shelter his head and neck from the sun-blaze, now at its hottest. For by now it was mid-day, and Sir Oliver was impatient for food and drink, as his wont was.

"What said he to you in the boat, Master Thurkill?" said Lucinda to the old fisherman.

"I was slow to catch his words, mistress; and they might have been another tongue than English of these parts, to my hearing. But my son's ears are younger than mine, and he made out another man had been on the wreck and had swummen away for the shore, for assistance, if he could light on it. But he'd have had to be a rare swimmer to get this side of the Scrimbles in a full tide. It was him we started out to seek. But we found nowt of him, and he's past help now."

The young man Reuben, at his corner of the litter, turned his head to say: "He was a Dutchman, by name Vanhelst. This one is English, but I couldn't be sure to say the name of him right. . . . What did you make it out to be, father? . . ."

"A Spaniard sort of name. Malovra—Maloovra—Vincent. . . ."

"There you have it! Vincent Malloovara. . . ."

"Never Vincent Mauleverer?"

"Why, yes, mistress! You speak it better than I do."

"What has my lady found so good to laugh at?" says Sir Oliver, coming within hearing, having hung behind some paces to speak with John Rackham, who had just ridden back from his errand, and to rate him for being so long behindhand.

"Listen to this, now, Oliver!" cries Lucinda. "Or come hither and guess the name of the man off the wreck. Thou wilt never guess it, that's certain!" And then she fell back to join him, and they spoke apart, out of hearing of the rest. John Rackham, being nearest, heard surprise in his master's voice, and that he said:

“What, your brother’s name, in Virginia! Od’s my life!—two of the same name, and you knew it not.”

But the groom was a taciturn man and glum, who kept all his chance hearings back, to use them to his advantage as he best might. So none knew, but himself and Sir Oliver, why the Lady of the Manor, as Lucinda was called by the fisher-folk, should laugh out in her surprise at the name of the disabled man on the litter. And when Mrs. Trant, at the Manor, after asked it of him, his reply was that the fellow was some Dutch *skellum*, that being a cant epithet, derived from a Dutch word, current at that date, and meaning a scoundrel—a worthless fellow. But as for his name, he had had enough ado to keep a hand on his horse, which would not give in to the rein, without listening to gibberish. For all tongues not his own were gibberish, according to John Rackham.



## CHAPTER IX

"If his eyes be out, and he knows not thy voice, nor my name never came to his ears till now, plague take me if I see any good to come of his enlightenment!" Thus Sir Oliver, at his wine, to Lucinda. She for her part is all tears, and in great distress at something lately come to her knowledge. Her tirewoman has done her work but ill, or she herself has dishevelled her hair with a careless hand; and she has sent away more dishes than one untasted; not caring, she says, for supper on so hot and close an evening.

For the afternoon of the day has gone by, and she knows now who the man is whom a strange chance has brought beneath the roof of her lover.

"But oh, Oliver, is it not hard to bear? Think, sweetheart, think! My dear father's son, whom you never saw! Think of the cruelty, that I cannot take him in my arms and kiss him as I kissed him for farewell eight years ago when he went off to cross the great sea alone! Eight long years ago! A boy, not twenty! And there was I, and there was Amy, and there was my mother! And none of us could kiss him enough for such a parting. And now . . . and now . . . !"

"And now thou wilt be a fool, girl! But kiss him, if you are minded to do so; only tell him not your name. Say 'tis a new fashion, now the King has come to his own again. Or, look you, kiss him as he sleeps; and, if he wakes—ho, ho!—put it off on Susan Trant. *She'll* never be the worse by it!"

"You will always have your jest, Oliver mine! But I know well the pity there is in your heart for me, for all you turn everything to a merriment. Never fear, though, that Vincent shall know me again for his sister; it shall be as you say, sweetheart. But if his sight come to him again of a sudden, and he sees me . . . how then, Oliver?"

"Keep thine own counsel, girl! What!—a little maid of twelve—a buxom wench of twenty! How should thy brother know thee in the face of a firm denial? But it must be none of your half strokes—none of your timorous will-say won't-says! A good honest *lie*, Mistress Lucy!" And here her lover's face all but made Lucinda doubt him, so dark was his look. "He will ask thee thy maiden name, and thou must be ready with one, that there may be no spluttering over it, good-lack! Else it would be a safer game by far to tell him out the whole, and then if he is minded to cross swords with me over what he will call—ho, ho!—his sister's *honour*, why—there be swords in the house . . . what ails thee, wench? . . . As white as thy handkerchief!"

But though she was white, and feeling sick and desperate, Lucinda was strong to face the position. She could see reason in Sir Oliver's words; and, worst of all, that should this brother of hers come to a knowledge of the truth, his first aim when his sight returned would be to avenge the wrong done to an honoured name, even though she should pray him on her knees to think of her as in truth Oliver's wife in the eyes of God, and to spare to her a lover dearer than her life.

Of all confession of sin is any so hard to make as that of the sister who has to speak it to her brother? So Lucinda asked herself, and was glad to leave the question

unanswered; trying to believe that all her motive for counterfeiting was in reality her horror of bloodshed; all the stronger that, in the fray that might come about, the victor's sword—whichever he were—must needs pierce her own heart. She could persuade herself that, but for this, she would have no hesitation in laying bare her soul to her brother, and challenging him to answer another question she asked herself again and again. "If this be sin, how comes it that I feel no guilt?" For she would have it in her heart of hearts that she who marries without love is a greater sinner than she who loves without marriage. And yet, if this be a truth, it must be true also that one of the Holiest of the Church's Sacraments is no more than a mockery, being of no avail to make right a thing wrong in itself. But this headstrong girl is young still, and there is no Divine at hand to make her see how the power of God is manifested in these His Sacraments, whereof this one of holy wedlock can make acceptable to Him a thing His Wisdom would else hold damnable, however much He in His mercy may welcome the sinner who repenteth. But why need we look so curiously into the errors of a wilful girl? Enough for the moment that she could deceive herself with the thought that she would be consulting her brother's welfare as much as her own, in lending herself to the acting of a falsehood, as her lover in his cunning had suggested.

"What name would you have me say was mine, if I must play the liar, Oliver?" said she.

"Zounds, girl, what can it matter? Any name you will! Pepys—Olipphant—no!—say, if he asks for it, as he may never do, that your name was Asmondeham; that is, look you, the name of the wife I am wedded to and cannot be quit of. You have her place, so it is no great

wrong to borrow her name. And then, seeing I have told you of this thing and that about her, you may amuse his lordship, should he press for more particulars, with the like tales about thyself. So shall we be safeguarded from contradiction of each other's stories. . . . How, silly lass? Why, thus—that if he asks me privily what part of the country your kindred are natives of, and I say Shropshire, we shall be both of a tale. And there again an advantage! As thou knowest nothing of the Salopians, nor of Church Stretton, whence her folk came, neither will he, in all likelihood. So be wise and do as I tell thee.”

Then Lucinda thought to herself how clever a man was this lover of hers, and being blind from love of him, found it an easy task to palliate his counsel of duplicity; and all the easier that she would thereby be safer in her intercourse with her brother, and not compelled to be always inventing. That would have been very little to her liking; nor was she confident, as some are, that she could make any false history of her own devising plausible.

The way of her coming to the recognition of her brother was thus. He was brought to the door on his litter, always unconscious, as though he slept; and then, the oars that flanked it being overlong to pass up the stairway, was carried upstairs on the shoulders of Reuben Thurkill, roused and crying out from pain of an injury to his right thigh. Being then placed with all care and gentleness, but much difficulty, on a bed in a room of an upper floor, Lucinda set herself to remove the bandage from his eyes—a thing that called for a light hand, for the face was scorched over all, and the eyebrows and lashes burnt to

mere black stubble, and all the hair over his brows burnt. But his chin and lips were close shaven, and not so long since. Lucinda did what she might to ease the pain of his burns; applying an unguent of spermaceti, and covering them from the air with cool applications of linen dipped in water with a little vinegar. But for his eyes, they appeared to be in no worse plight than any eyes that seem to see, and see not, or very imperfectly: otherwise, except for the injury to his limb, as aforesaid, and a cutlass-wound in the forearm, of no great seriousness, and a fair allowance of bruises, he seemed to have a sound skin, and indeed to have come very fortunately through a fray such as that of the previous day.

The nearest surgical help being at Bury Market, seven miles away, John Rackham was despatched to find it, if he might; and seeing that, even if he made the distance over the heath in half-an-hour, it would none the less be a matter of time to find the man he sought, who might be miles away with another patient, and to bring him along on some slow ambling pad to Kips Manor, there would certainly be three hours of waiting until the broken or dislocated thigh-bone could have proper attention. So when the patient had drunk and eaten, and all that was possible had been done towards setting him at ease, Lucinda put herself to find who he was and whence, never then suspecting the truth, and that too in spite of her knowledge that his name was also her brother's. To her this was but a proof that another man had her brother's name. And why not?—seeing that her brother was in America.

Says she to him then: “Can you, sir, now talk without pain, to tell us who you are, and what we may do best to find your belongings; whether they be kin, or wife, or

friends? Think what rejoicing there will be among them, to hear you have escaped with life."

To which he makes answer: "I would I could know first before I tell of myself what has befallen mine enemy. Make me but certain that he has come ashore sound and well, and I shall be in all the better trim for the telling of a long story. Until I know of his safety I have no heart for talking of my own affairs. Tell me, mistress, is there no news come to hand of him?"

"You speak of the man who was with you on the wreck, who swam away before the boat came—why, I know not. There is no news of him yet. But he may get ashore if he can keep afloat till the slack of the tide."

"What a fool was I that I could not keep my wits an hour longer! If I could have but spoken the words to keep your fellows to the search, we should have found him. Or, in default of that, we should have sought till the night fell. But I pray Heaven he has saved himself by now."

"Did you not say to the rowers this man was a Dutchman?"

"He was a Dutchman, and mine enemy. But he was my good friend and brother for all that, and I owe him my life, and would give it gladly for his, or to do him a good turn. You, mistress, are the lady of this house, as I take it, but I can only see you dimly—more's the pity!—as one sees through a fog. Something has gone amiss with my eyesight, since the great ship blew up over yonder. . . ."

"She was the Dutch Admiral?"

"Ay—the flagship. I was aboard the Cadmus frigate of fifty guns, gone to the bottom now, a mile farther out to sea. Our commander was Captain Askew. We had



just joined the fleet from cruising in the Channel, and were short-handed, having sent home such a many men in prizes to Harwich."

"Had there been other fights then, before?"

"Not a gun fired, that I saw. For the Dutch fleet were safe in the Texel. These were just merchantmen, home from the Indies, who never had a thought that war was declared till we sent marines aboard to tell 'em they were the lawful prisoners of His Gracious Majesty King Charles. I was sorry for the poor devils—after years away maybe!—all of 'em hungry for a meal at home, and a welcome from their wives."

Then it was that the thought crossed Lucinda's mind that this man's voice was not altogether strange to her, but only as a passing wonderment; for, did she not know her brother was in Virginia? Knowing it for a certainty, she imputed what was really a recognition of him, in the bud, to an influence, akin to witchery, of the knowledge that her brother's name was this man's also. Her mind was not at its best, said she to herself, to judge of anything. See what the tension of the last two days had been! She was the victim of nervous fancies—the sport of the moment. Why, no sooner had this illusion of his voice taken possession of her, than another must needs come sharp on the heels of it, that his hand as it lay on the coverlid was such a hand as Vincent's might have grown to be, given a life of exposure such as his, and continual warfare against the red men his letters had told of, in their own forests. So strong was what she as yet counted a mere distemper of a brain overstrung, that as he lay there speaking through the linen cloth she had thrown over his eyes to veil them from the light, a longing came on her to raise it and look again on his face,

that she might be sure it was not Vincent's. But she struggled against it as a childish fancy, and set herself to getting from him the story of the fight of yesterday.

"Is it great pain to you to talk?" said she. "If so, let me hear all these things from you another time."

"It is no worse pain to talk than to lie still. Indeed, talking suits me the better of the two, despite the trouble of a bruised limb. But I would I knew what has befallen my good friend of the wreck, whom I owe my life to."

"We may hear of him soon. He was a strong swimmer, and may have landed at some far point on the coast, and though he may have chanced on help and a shelter, there may easily have been none to send with the news of his safety. And further, how, I ask you, would his message be sent here, rather than to the nearest town? It may be the tidings will come from Caistorbury, when John Rackham arrives with the surgeon." But Lucinda only said this to soothe him, for she knew that the folk at Kips Manor would have the story long before it could reach Caistorbury, seven miles inland. She said more to the same end, and then: "Tell me, did this man save your life? Was it in the battle? But no!—how could that be? Was he not your enemy?"

The man laughed, and his voice caught with the pain his laugh gave him. "God's my life!" said he. "He was my enemy, but one to be proud of. If ever I live to face a better sword-stroke, I shall not live to tell of it. That was a good fight on the ship's deck, and might have ended amiss for either, but for a rare piece of luck."

"Friend, you may have been spared the guilt of murder. But how?"

"Am I sure that I know? It came about, somehow! I can't say how, but either of us was doing the best he

might to strangle the other, or break his ribs, when we went overboard in a heap—just a tangle, tight-locked!—and, to my thinking, this leg of mine struck the muzzle of a carronade, outside its port. So when I reached the water, I was at a loss how to swim. I could keep afloat, but I could not move on the water for the life of me. I saw some timber afloat I could have reached in a moment, else. Then a hand caught my hair from behind, and I felt myself dragged by a strong swimmer. As soon as I got a firm grip of my floating timber, I could see the man I owed my life to. He was my friend—mine enemy! Now you know, mistress, why my best prayer is that he may come ashore safe, and live to be my friend.”

Then it was that Lucinda said to this man: “Praise God for your deliverance, dear sir, and that He may reward the man who saved you. But tell me now more of yourself, and of your family and belongings, if such there be, in England, that we may lose no time in communicating with them, and giving them news of your safety. Think of the great joy of your wife, when she hears that you are not among the slain in this wicked encounter.” She paused at some disclaimer or dissent from her hearer, then went on, speaking with warmth. “Yes—but has it not been wicked, when not a man is living of all those who fought, who has dyed his hand in his brother’s blood, but might have called his enemy his friend—even as you so readily call this man friend who saved you—and loved him with a like love?”

“You take my meaning wrongly,” he replied. “I only meant that I have neither wife nor sweetheart; though for that matter, long as I have been away beyond the seas, I will stake my life upon it my little sister has not forgotten me. And as for the wickedness of him who fights

for his country when he is called upon, he has mighty little choice about doing so when he is impressed into the service. He has to serve the King, will he nill he! And he does best who acquits himself well and honourably, rather than turn traitor to his country at a pinch. Is it not a like chance for all?"

"A like chance and a deadly one!" said Lucinda. "Only believe me, dear sir, I meant no blame for you. But his guilt is great who forces another to do murder against his will—even greater, to my thought, than that of the honest assassin who uses knife or poison to avenge a private wrong." She hesitated a moment, and finished her speech with: "Do not let us talk of it. Let me ask of you instead a great kindness to myself. You are not in trim for letter-writing, and may not be perhaps for days; when, as I hope, your sight will return to you. For this I see, that the eye itself is uninjured, and this blindness is no true blindness, but a thing of the moment, bred of the mere sudden shock. . . ."

"That I think also, and hope. But what was it you said of letter-writing, and what kindness can one in my plight do in token of his gratitude. Name it, mistress, and it is yours, if it be within my reach to grant it."

"It seems to me much to ask, because I am unknown to you. . . ." She paused, remembering he did not even know her name; then, without more ado, supplied it: "I am Lady Raydon, and my husband is Sir Oliver Raydon, and this house is Kips Manor, where you now are . . . what? . . . yes, I will tell you. This I have to ask you is that I may get pen and paper here and now, and write straight away at your dictation to this little sister of yours, that she may know of your escape,

and come to be beside you here, if indeed the distance be not too great." But his interruption had been because because it crossed his mind that her name was not altogether strange to him. The pain of his leg made slight thoughts lapse easily, and he answered her last speech with almost a laugh.

"Is that the whole of it, Lady Raydon? Shall I score yet a little more to my account of gratitude to yourself, and then make believe I am your benefactor? But who so glad as I that the little wench should know her brother is living? Only this, dear lady, shall be a condition, before I tell aught of me or mine—that no tale of this action shall be written, either to her nor to my father, over and above what I dictate myself. For I would not have them think me crippled—only in hospital for a week at most. For it will be so, and no worse, I wager!"

So it was settled. Lucinda gets pens, ink, and paper with great joy, and seats herself at a table by the bedside with all in readiness for a start. But first she will write the date, both of time and place, and then she says: "Begin now. But not over-quick. For I write but slowly."

And then this man has begun to dictate his letter. But why does not Lucinda write? Why does she sit as one dumbfounded, and all agape, at the first words he utters? He, for his part, hearing no scrawling of the pen on the paper, thinks that maybe she is puzzled by the pet name he has addressed this sister by—for he knows it may sound strange—and, after a moment, repeats it: "Dearest little Mayjune! It is Lucy's nickname from a baby. 'Tis as though one should join the names of two months in one—May and June."

It was a strange and perilous freak of chance that, for Lucinda! To be forced to know, in a single moment, a truth her mind had till then refused to receive, in the face of a hundred little things, any one of which might have shown it to her had she been—so she thought now—but duly shrewd of observation! To have no alternative but to make, alone and unassisted, her choice of two courses, either one as full of pitfalls as the other. Should she obey her heart, and say at once to this man—who surely was her brother Vincent, and no other, somehow returned without warning from his strange home beyond the seas—“I—I am Lucinda. I am Mayjune, whom you left eight years ago almost a baby—just clear of the nursery—a wilful scrap of innocence—and now a woman with a dire experience of life and its treacheries”? Or should she choose the course which shame and fear and prudence seemed in league to dictate, and leave him in his ignorance, knowing that he need never guess that his sister is beside him, could she but command her tongue?

But can it be truly said that in the first shock of her hearing who this man was these thoughts passed through her mind? Rather, it would be true to say that she felt sick with the foreknowledge that they would do so soon, and that an answer would have to be found for the question, Which shall it be, confession or silence? Stunned and dazed, but compelled to act that she might keep the choice an open one, she just found voice to say, “I see,” in answer to his explanation of her own old name in childhood, and to write it with a shaking hand and a beating heart, glad that he could not see the unsteady, ill-shaped lettering, nor what she knew must be her face as she wrote.



'And she must hear him, too, as he continues, each word harder for her to bear than the last:—

"'Dearest little Mayjune' . . . Have you that, Lady Raydon?—all o' one word, you know, not two . . . 'Where dost thou think, little pet, I write this?' . . . Ah, but stop now; it is not I that write. How shall I say it? . . . Yes, I see! Go on thus. . . . 'It is not I that write, as is plain by the handwriting, but a friend that you shall one day know and love, if I can compass it, and she deny me not. For my right hand is in a sling—a slight hurt—it will be sound again in a week, and I shall be good for a ride across country to my old home and my dear father and my little Mayjune. For it is in England that I write this, and very like, except the post travel quicker than I think, I shall reach my little pet the sooner of the two.' " . . . Then he paused a moment to say: "What a shame is this, Lady Raydon, that I should ask you to pen such a false tale, and like enough all the while a week's nursing will set me on my legs again, and give me eyes to see what my little maid has grown to. For I can only think of her still as the bonny little maid she was eight years ago, riding of her pony Jezebel with all her black locks loose in the wind. . . ."

Then Lucinda tried to speak, but her voice would not come. Her brother suspected nothing wrong, for he still heard the scratching of her pen, and put her silence down to the claim of her writing on her attention, outweighing his chat about a child she had no interest in. If he could have known how this memory of her little horse and its name had cut her to the heart!

But the strain of it all is not to climax now. Her pretence of writing—for it is little else; just an excuse for

silence and to make her seem preoccupied—is made needless by the arrival of the surgeon. Yet she will not run—not she!—to be out of sight and hearing even of her brother's pain. She stays by the surgeon with a strong hand and ready eye, to kelp at a pinch. And all her strength is wanted, as well as John Rackham's, to draw the limb into position, while the surgeon—an original who loves his own way of doing things—seated on the bed, uses his foot to effect the reduction of the thigh-bone to its socket. Which being done, and the patient helped against the reaction of the pain with a strong draught of *rosa solis*, he is left to sleep, being by this time quite unfit for any further talk; and Lucinda is off to seek for rest and silence awhile, to think it all over, but with the knowledge strong on her that this is her brother Vincent, and that he can neither see her nor dream that it is she.

Neither can he; for, just as she had once held it impossible his name should be her brother's other than by a chance, a hazard, so he held his own certainty that she *could* not be his sister reason sufficient to confute a strange sense of Lucy's voice in hers, that just touched his mind and died.

## CHAPTER X

THERE are women whose comeliness of face strikes no man at first sight; but, coming on him later, grows and grows until he wonders at the blindness that saw it not at the outset.

Susan Trant, the farmer's wife, was one such; her eyes, that a premature decision pronounced too green, growing daily in fascination, the more from her silent manner, having often the force of speech. For she was one who saw much and said little.

Between her and John Rackham it was a question, though neither had ever admitted it to the other, which should see most or say least. But whereas the groom was glum and taciturn solely from inherent vice of blood, and of a demeanour importing neither malice nor goodwill to his employer, the tirewoman's reserve had a motive behind it, one mixed up with an old grudge and a longing to avenge it that meant to die hard, if it ever died at all. So far, a resentment of which this tale may speak, to give colour to her conduct later, had lost little if any of its vigour of twenty years back, when this same Sir Oliver, then no more than a boy in years, though a man in wickedness, had made light of the vows of love and constancy he had employed for the betrayal of this same Susan, then a village beauty on a farm near by. For whenever her husband, Jonah Trant, went back on the terms of his marriage with her; taunting her with it and reproaching himself that he had not driven a better

bargain; saying, what was two hundred pounds that it should saddle a man with a shrew for life?—and what a fool had he been not to throw it back in the young squire's face!—when he did this, and it was often enough, Susan, though she found it pleased her to vex him still more by flinging it at him that he had been outwitted, and to her knowledge the two hundred might well have been five, seeing it was Sir Oliver's mother, not himself, would find the money, yet at each skirmish of this kind more fuel was heaped on the fire of concealed anger that she kept burning in her secret heart against her former lover and betrayer.

Therefore this woman, for all she seemed smooth and complaisant, was never off the watch for a good chance to clear scores with Sir Oliver, more for the slight he had put upon her in shifting her off on a stupid clown than for what most would have counted a greater wrong. Still, in despite of this treasured prospect of revenge, so little of reason was there, or coherency of either love or hatred in her feelings towards him, that at a slight word of kindness, a rough kiss in jest—any little lover-like token—she would be all his own again; and yet, when he forsook this attitude for that of a child sick of a toy that pleased him once, or that of a master with a right to obedience, she would bid farewell to any thought of tenderness for him, and make way for her old brooding over a day of retribution to come, when he should expiate the wrong he had done her. She half cherished even then a thought behind—that it would be sweet for her to hold a jurisdiction of pardon, a right of clemency, that, being exercised, would bring him to her feet in repentance.

But this thought waned, and that of her desired

revenge grew, in the days that followed Lucinda's arrival at Kips Manor. Susan Trant's jealousy of each new victim of her former lover was always tempered by the thought that this one, too, would be flung aside in her turn, as her predecessors were, as she herself had been. Flung aside, too, without the chances she herself enjoyed of returning now, and again to favour, as she had been in times past, and might be again, for all her husband might have to say of it—for was not Farmer Trant the squire's tenant, and was he not safest from the harm a landlord might do, and securest of the boons a landlord might confer, if he kept his eyes closed to what he could not help? But Lucinda had not been long at the Manor before this woman's shrewd eye saw danger ahead. Could Sir Oliver be trusted to tire of this new favourite, with her rich beauty and her marvellous grace, her voice the palate of the ear could drink like wine, her sweet hands whose warmth struck life into the one they touched?

As the days wore on, Susan watched stealthily for the dawn of his weariness of Lucinda, and watched in vain. All the stronger was the life of her resentment against Sir Oliver as she saw, each day more plainly, a future of entire neglect. She cast about, so far as might be without raising suspicion, to find the story of this last Lady Raydon; whence she came, and of what stock. For she knew nothing but by hearsay of Sir Oliver's belongings elsewhere, having lived all her life at her parents' farm or her husband's, and having no notion of any town larger in the world than Caistorbury.

Now John Rackham, the groom, was the only one at Kips Manor who knew more of the Old Hall and Sir Oliver's lawful wife than the bare fact of their existence.

So Susan Trant plotted continually to get behind the barrier of this man's stolid silence, and had the best of him in the end. For she found from him all she wanted to know concerning Lucinda, and put her knowledge by to use on occasion shown.

The way of it was this: Mr. Rackham, having it on hand to prepare a hot fomentation for a young horse suffering from the strangles, found his way into the kitchen in search of hot water, having no fire in the stables since the great heat of the weather. Now, his manner of life was that of a recluse, sleeping in the loft above the horses, on the sacking of a truckle-bed, wrapped in a horse-cloth, and rarely coming near the other members of the household; who, for their part, were content, none coveting the society of this man, who was always morose, and when at his best merely silent. So that his appearance in the kitchen, where Mrs. Trant was alone, knitting of a pair of hose, was a thing to speak some apology for. Or it may be Mr. Rackham's meaning merely was that it was none of his own choice that he came, and always mixed unwillingly with his kind, when he said: "I'll be here to trouble you, Mistress Susan, no longer time than for the kettle to run. You may take my word for it."

"Do you look to have the water boiling, Master Rackham?" says Susan to him then. "If you're content with just the bare heat to hold your hand in, you won't need to bide any longer than you say."

"It will have to be on the boil, for my money, mistress."

"Then you may turn to and blow the fire, Master Rackham, or wait for its burning. It will burn of itself, one day, if you have the patience to wait." Whereupon



the groom took the bellows, and got a flame from the dead wood, making the kettle sing.

The less need, with a kettle singing, for a grudging or hostile tone in negotiating so simple a matter. At least, Mrs. Trant may have thought so, for as soon as the water seemed like to boil she spoke conciliatorily. "It's warm work, a day like this, to blow a fire up," said she.

"Dry, mistress!" That was all, but it was expressive. She took the hint, and went out, returning shortly with a pottle-pot with a crest of foam, at the sight of which Mr. Rackham softened. This was the way to his heart. "I was thinking it was about time," said he graciously.

"You don't get a glass of ale like that at Croxley Thorpe, Master Rackham."

The groom had swallowed it at a draught, and it was getting at his vitals. It was not a moment to disparage it. "It don't go down amiss," said he. It was a concession, for him. But he qualified it in a moment after. "It's a poor ale, too, to compare with the old Squire's brew. None o' that in these days! Young Oliver, he's all for French wines, and old malt's forgotten." This man was well over sixty, but not much unlike himself at twenty-six. The days of Oliver's father were fresh in his memory.

"I suppose you knew the old lady well, Master Rackham?" said Mrs. Trant, working cleverly round to what she wanted. She worded her question nicely with a purpose.

"Sir Oliver's mother? Ah—I knew her well! Old Dot-and-go-one, we called her. Dead of a broken heart, they said. Just on fifteen years ago."

"The poor soul—think of it! But *she* was not the old lady I spoke of. The former Lady Raydon, I should

have said." But it was only a make-believe of Mistress Susan that she thought Sir Oliver a widower. She knew better than to think that. Then she would know what Mr. Rackham could see to laugh at. Whereupon he laughed more.

"There be but one Lady Raydon," said he. "And she's alive and merry in London Town, and may make free at her will. 'Tis a knot Master Oliver will be slow to unloose, I take it, even if she gives him a handle."

"Then this is no wife of his, but just a woman?"

"Just a woman, Mistress Susan. She's no better than 'ere a one of ye."

Then Mrs. Trant, being a wedded wife, and very lenient to herself in her own conscience for any lapse her husband chose to shut his eyes to, kept her tongue from saying that Lucinda might well do penance in the market-place, and from using other choice phrases that would sting—as, for example, that favourite resource of speech, the word *shame*, so good to employ in like cases. She did this as caring more to get at the story of her mistress, wife or no, than to sit in the proud seat of offended virtue. Moreover, she felt unsure of what the groom's last words meant. Did he know her own story?

What did it matter? He would keep silence about it, except, indeed, she asked him to do so, which would be giving him an incentive to speech. Her object now was to find somewhat of Lucinda's story, of her family, and the like. Was *she*, too, married—a deserter of her proper mate? Mrs. Susan's comely presence and placid mien went well with a seeming unconcern as she sat knitting for a full minute before asking: "What was the girl's name you said? Tell me it again."

"The name of her? I said nowt."

"It was my mistaking, Mr. Rackham. And, after all, 'tis none of your business, nor mine." Having said this, she in her cunning knew no more would be needed, judging rightly that the groom would tell her before the kettle, which still only sang, should boil up. She knew, too, that the less she seemed to wish to hear the more likely he would be to tell, and knitted as one contented. But her ears were on the watch.

Then he, vexed perhaps that he should have no pleasure in the withholding of information from one keen to obtain it, thought to egg his questioner on to asking more. "Maybe none of yours, mistress," said he. "But I have no need to ask about it, seeing I've known her from a child. They can tell you the tale anywheres near the Old Hall."

"In Shropshire?"

"Who said a word of Shropshire?"

"That's where she came from. I've heard her tell it herself. So has my mother. Church Stretton, in Shropshire." This was said with assured conviction, for it was true. Lucinda had followed her lover's advice, and had given herself the name, and other style and title, of his actual wife still living. She had done this in the presence of Mrs. Hatsell, Susan Trant's mother, relying on the old woman's deafness.

This conversation of the maid and groom, you see, came about some time after the landing of her brother Vincent; but while, as shall be shown later, he was still too blind to recognise her face. Keep in mind that he was then still bed-ridden, with the slow healing of the leg, and that Rackham, the groom, had not, so far, come to know anything of his name or belongings. Indeed,

the patient had spoken of them to none but Lucinda, and been overheard by none but Mrs. Trant, who kept her counsel, or her mother.

Mr. Rackham's pale eyes were not made to open wide, but they did their best. Under the strain, each came out near the shape of his mouth, puckered up for a whistle. But he changed his mind suddenly, and recovered his stolidity. Instead of putting his surprise into words, he said only: "Belike you got her name at the same time?"

"I might have, had I not scrupled to listen closely. For the name of the place, it was spoken loud. But her own name, as I heard it, can never have reached me right. The sound of it was Ass Mundham."

Mr. Rackham's whistle came, after all. This was too much. "Why, mistress," said he, "that's the name of the wife's family—she that's out at grass in London. And there's where *she* came from—Church Stretton, in Shropshire."

Mrs. Trant preferred not to show surprise. "Of course, this would explain it," she said. "Madam Lucinda"—no 'Lady Raydon' now!—"was speaking of the Church Stretton lady, his lawful wedded wife—out at grass, did you say? . . . But come now, Mr. Rackham, what *was* her real name?" Thus pressed, the groom gave Lucinda her name grudgingly. She was just little Lucy Mauleverer at the Old Hall, that he could remember from a child. She was always a wild young filly—never made for harness.

"Is her mother living?" The knowledge that the name was that of Vincent, inexplicably, had discomposed Mrs. Trant, and she wished to conceal the fact. This question did to ask, as well as another. No—her

mother was not living. Was her father? But the kettle boiled suddenly, and no answer came. Not so suddenly, though, but that Mrs. Susan could see that the information would have been withheld or evaded. There was something to be learned there, she was convinced.

So, as we now know from this talk of the groom and the tire-woman, Lucinda had done as Sir Oliver bade her, and had clothed herself with a false identity that she might remain unknown to the brother who had come upon her so strangely. How gladly, a few weeks later, would she have gone back and unsaid her tale! For the torment of misapprehensions, bred of his continual reference to his home and family, always unknowing to whom he spoke, kept her in constant fear of a knife through her heart. Indeed, it was little less, especially when he went back on the tales of their old days together, when all her longing was to strike in upon his memories, and compare them with her own.

It was ill enough for her to listen to all this Vincent's speculation as to what his old home looked like; or should he find the old man strong and well; or, of all the girls he knew in old days, would there be one left for him, neither betrothed nor wedded? As when, for instance, he spoke of Phyllis Kettering, saying how he wondered what sort of woman Phyllis had grown to be, seeing she was the sort after his own heart. For then Lucinda's leapt to tell how when Vincent said farewell eight years ago, Phyllis, being then fourteen, had told her with a many tears that she would surely lead apes in Hell, except Vincent came back to marry her. She did not know if Phyllis were wed or not, but what joy it would have been to tell this little tale, half for a joke! And it was she herself that had padlocked her lips thus, all

of her own evil choice, and who could say they would ever be free to speak again?

It was worse still when his talk ran on herself, he being all in ignorance whose were the ears that heard him. For then he would tell of their freaks of childhood together, that she could have told him, word by word, seeing she remembered them all as yesterday. It hurt her keenly to hear his narrative of a particular incident that was always known to him and his little sisters as "The Quarrel," which lasted two whole days; and when he related it at a request from her—which was in itself a lie—she could scarcely suppress her correction of an error in his version of the story, and refrain from stopping him with—"Oh, but Vincey, it *was* me that was to be the Ghost, and not Amy at all. It was a *shame!*" But this, like a hundred other things, she had to choke back, though she felt sick with silence.

He, for his part, mended apace, and could soon stand erect on his feet again, and shift for himself. When this time came, each day saw him move further afoot; and had his eyesight returned as quickly, he might safely have given way to his own impatience and started across country for his father's residence. There, had his dream of the place as it was been true, he would have found his old father, all hale and hearty, only the least bit more grizzled since his last sight of him, and that little treasured pet of a sister—a woman now, of course; that couldn't be helped! And even, for his imagination shrank from killing them, the dear old dogs and horses of the old time. Amy, he knew, was dead, and their mother, two years ago now.

But his fancies were throughout at fault. The old Hall was silent as the grave that held all a murderer's



sword had left him of his father; and that little sister, the jewel of his memory, was the woman beside him now, whom he began to see dimly, but without a thought that she was other than a stranger—good, sweet, and hospitable to a chance victim of ill-luck—but still a stranger! And that same genial host of his—for who could be more gracious than Oliver when he chose?—that polished gentleman he would have accounted it disloyalty to question or mistrust, that careless, generous votary of pardonable pleasures, but withal that faithful husband of an adored wife—he, even he, was his father's murderer.

But why should Vincent have suspected anything amiss? He might have done so—granted!—had his eyesight come more quickly to his help. A thousand little things happened that a shrewd eye might have read danger into, but that no accompaniment of speech betrayed the nature of. The very slowness of his recovery helped the firmness of his belief that this sweet hostess of his, whom he, of course, adored, was none other than she had described herself—namely, Lucinda Asmondeham, married to a neighbour of his father's whom he had never chanced to see himself. The tale served for unsuspicion such as his. But it was with much misgiving that she had said Lucinda in place of the true Lady Raydon's christened name, Arbella. Yet the risk would have been greater on the other tack, for all the household and folk about had come to know her name and could have called her by it, but for respect of station. Now, none of them all knew that the lawful Lady Raydon's name was not Lucinda; unless, perhaps, John Rackham, and he spoke to none.

Having given her own name, it was safest to challenge it as it were, when it came again in his first narrative

of herself, and to say what a strange chance was this that had given one name to his sister and herself! Thus more was made of it than needed, for talk's sake; and each knowing this, the matter passed easily by, and was easily forgotten—the more so that the name was not uncommon in those days.

Which was the greater grief to Lucinda it would have been hard to say—to have her brother thus near her, and yet held away from him at arm's length, or to have to wait in vain the letter from her father, that still came not. And thereto was added this involvement of all her labyrinth of difficulty. What should she do or say when the answer came to the letter she had written at Vincent's dictation to their father, which answer must of necessity make her known to Vincent, do what she might? Was it likely that her father would omit all mention of her own dishonour, and keep back the name of her betrayer? Oh, the torture it would be to him to tell it! Why had she been so mad as not to foresee all this, when she gave way to Oliver's behest of secrecy?

But what was done, was done. At least, the evil hour was postponed that must one day—she shuddered to think of it—place these two men face to face, with drawn swords between them. And see now, what Vincent had been on that ship's deck!

That letter she had written for Vincent, many a word of which had stung her like an adder, told the story in full of his return from Virginia. He had made his resolve suddenly, more from a roving disposition than any other cause, but stimulated by the offer of a good passage in a ship whose captain he had confidence in, being an old friend and schoolfellow. In those days good passages across the Atlantic were not so common as they have

become of late years. On the voyage all went well, but on landing at Bristol, he and others on the ship were seized by the press-gang, and compelled to take service on a man-of-war of his Majesty's, then fitting in Plymouth Dockyard. But could he not have bought himself out? asked Lucinda. Why, yes, so he might! But a battle was certain with the Dutch, and he had never seen a sea-fight. He was no craven, and 'twas a great temptation to a man of spirit. The life, though, was of the roughest, and now he had once been half-crippled in the King's service, he was the less minded to serve again, except it should be on occasion shown, as in the event of a national danger. For that was the temper of men in those days, and to the thinking of him who writes this, it had a good side to it, as well as a bad one, for then all men were not only given up to mere commercial gain, as now, and lives of luxury at home. This, however, is not for the story to determine. Vincent's letter went on to tell of the cruiser in the Channel and of how the ship joined the fleet, by a rare stroke of luck, just in time for the battle. Twelve hours of a head-wind, and they would have lost it!

Then he told, at too great a length to resume, the story of the fight. His own ship, heeling over somewhat from a cause he could not explain, was struck below the water-line by more shots than one of a broadside from the Dutch Admiral; and when all of the Dutch fleet that were in sailing trim put out to sea, and the signal for pursuit was hoisted on the Duke of York's flagship, his own was waterlogged, and no better than a sheer hulk. On which her Captain, Askew, being in doubt whether to man the boats and make for the shore or to try his luck at the capture of the Dutch Admiral, still above water,

put the question to his crew, to say should it be the one way or the other. Who, being all of one mind, were told out to their boats, Vincent himself being in the foremost boat, at his own wish. All but one boat to carry those already wounded ashore, for it was now certain the ship would not be long afloat.

Then came the fight on the deck of the Dutch Admiral, which was already known to Lucinda, seeing she had in a sense been witness of it, through the hearing of Sir Oliver's running comment, as it passed before his eyes. And then says she, staying the writing for a moment: "What became of the boat with the wounded men? They came not ashore."

"I know not," said Vincent. "But the odds are they delayed their landing, for they would have been keen to see the boarders at work, and like enough hung about too near for safety, to see what was doing. But for my part, I saw nothing to tell of, being dizzy with the shake I got falling; and I had barely come to my thinking senses, and used my sight to see that the man who had saved me was my friend I had that tussle with on the deck, when the Dutchman's powder-magazine must needs catch alight, and off she goes! A fine sight, but I would I had looked the other way about, now. For something aflame struck me across the eyes; and for the rest, you know it as well as I do, Lady Raydon."

The letter being soon finished, for Lucinda used a free hand in transcribing all her brother's gratitude to herself, what was to be done about the sending of it, seeing that her father would know who was spoken of as Lady Raydon, even without the help of the handwriting and the date, Kips Manor? There could be but one Kips Manor. And how should her father be able to guess at

once her many reasons for her concealment from her brother? It was a problem beyond her powers to solve, and she could take none but Sir Oliver into her confidence.

“Foolish wench!” said he. “Did I not tell thee that a lie half-told saves no man from the gallows?”

“But, dearest Oliver, I can see no lie, nor colour, nor gloss, that I can put upon it, that will make me right in my father’s eyes, say what I may! And yet I feel no shame of my own falsehood to poor Vincey, seeing I act for his sake, and to hold over all cause of quarrel till we are free to wed, and the clouds gone. Oh, Oliver, it will come—the happy time!”

“And think you Master Vincent will be all forgiveness when it does come, fairest Lucy?”

“As for Vincent, I know not; but for my father, him I am sure of. And dost thou think, sweetheart, his bidding would have no weight with the boy? For I grant you Vincey is a boy, and headstrong!”

Then Sir Oliver’s face got that same look upon it that it had that morning when he fell stricken by the falling sickness at the New Hall, no such long time since. Long enough, though, for Lucinda to have begun building hopes that that evil might be counted a thing of the past—a thing never to recur again.

He paused a moment, to find something to say that would not stick in his throat—the throat of an old liar, and experienced. He found nothing better than: “Thy father, my girl, will say little enough, I doubt not. But as for what you had best write to him now, I see no harm to come of telling him why you have thought it best that your brother should be kept in ignorance. Can you explain it else? It is no uncommon thing to hood-

wink a sick man for his own sake, so he may live at ease till his natural strength is his own again, rather than have care on his mind to throw him back." He paused a moment, a little proud of his device for setting present difficulty at rest; then added, in a lighter mood: "For my part, I see nothing to be gained by keeping the truth from him. Thou mayst tell him, lass, for all I care."

Thereupon Lucinda, thinking to herself how clever and how good at heart was this lover of hers, and seeing her way out of an embarrassment at least, sits down and writes a long letter to her father, to go with Vincent's, explaining all her action in the sense of Sir Oliver's suggestion. Having finished it to her liking, she shows it to him, not without pride, and happier in her mind; begging that John Rackham may ride with it forthwith, that her father may have it at the earliest. For then he will surely write back to her and break his long silence, which is still bitter to her heart.

Sir Oliver read both letters through—for she had asked Vincent's leave to show his, for the sake of its tale of the battle—with a "Humph!" for this and a "So!" for that; but an approval in the end, under protest. The letter would do no harm, at least. He could have no secret under-grin at Lucinda's ignorance; his own knowledge went too near the quick, and left him no heart for amusement.

But who so willing as he that the letter should go? Give it to him! He would direct it and see to it that John Rackham lost no time over despatching it. And thereupon he took it away with him to his little private room, and put it in safety in his wicked cabinet. But for security he folded and directed a counterfeit letter, that he might seem to hand it to the messenger with



others of his own, so that no suspicion might hang about. And my lady was to see it if she asked, said he; whereon John Rackham, feeling some roguery afoot, held his peace; but took good care this letter should be visible in his hand when his mistress had sight of him departing to carry it to the Cobbler with Two Wives, where the local carrier would take it on to the new post in the London Road, to await the new Government Mail. On seeing which, Lucinda was happy, and could tell her brother it had gone off safely, and he might look to have an answer within a month.

## CHAPTER XI

SIR OLIVER was gloomy and morose, passing much of his time in his sanctum, and leaving his guest, after the midday meal, to the entertainment of his mistress, having no misgiving that any ill could come of his doing so. He knew now the relation of the two to each other; judging of Vincent that he was not a man of his own type, but one who, in spite of his solderlike qualities, had a trace of what he called a psalm-singer about him. Were not Cromwell's Ironsides brave fighting-men, and yet practised what some look on as the common decencies of life? This Oliver accounted such practice, for some strange reason, as akin to psalm-singing. Besides, psalm-singer or no, Vincent, being blind, was in the dark to the beauty of Lucinda. No—there could be no miscarriage of event there! Oliver drank his sack in solitude, without a qualm of uneasiness; and indeed his judgment was shrewd enough to measure rightly the safety of the position, his observation from afar of the curious habits of honourable men and sweet-hearted women having given him an insight into their ways that he could not have acquired from any knowledge of himself.

But a great black shadow was over him in his solitude, and he knew he had courted it for the selfsame reason that had made him flinch away from Lucinda on that accursed day of the duel with her father. He was apprehensive, too, that this shadow might mean what it meant then; and, if he was to fall insensible again, and wake again

without control of tongue or sequence of thought, why—let him at least be alone! Who could tell what he might not say in his wandering; and that, too, in the presence of the son of the man he had slain? Slain in fair fight, mind you, not murdered—nothing of that!

So on the afternoon of the day that John Rackham rode with the letter—which, though fairly directed without, was so much blank paper within—Lucinda and her brother, to whom she was still almost invisible, talked together of his departure, which would not be long delayed, seeing how quickly he was improving. For each day he could walk farther, and see more plainly.

“I could ride with a guide to show the way, Lady Raydon,” said he, “if I could not see my own hand. But that is nothing. My only reason for delaying to relieve my kind host and hostess, whom I can never thank enough, of my company . . .”

“Say nothing of that.” . . .

“Well—did your generosity not forbid my speech of it, it would be a good reason, at least . . . I mean that I would soonest be able to see my old dad—dearest of fathers, Lady Raydon—when I come back to him after eight long years of absence. And my little Lucinda—your namesake, dear lady—think of my perplexity, to find her a tall woman to the touch, her lips and mine own so near of a level, and to see but a shadow, as I see you now to my sorrow. Then, mark you, by that fact hangs another reason, and a sound one. It would suit my liking ill to leave this hospitable house having seen so little in the way of fair vision of my kind host and hostess. Is it not hard that I should carry away no true image of either?”

Then Lucinda, under the torment of words fraught

with a hundred accidents of cruelty for her, made a slip of speech. "Oh, Vincent," she cried out in her confusion, "how *can* you stay too long?" And thereupon sat aghast at her mistake.

But she had less need than she thought for her embarrassment. It may be that the winds of the broad Atlantic, and the great silences of the primeval forest of Virginia, had worked together to the weeding out of her hearer's mind the petty usages of speech—the little formalities of address nicely balanced to suit each speaker in his grade of life—till it seemed to him none so strange a thing that a lady should, for sheer graciousness, and no other reason, call him by his proper name. For whatever cause, her use of it had no disconcerting effect on him, but made him laugh out with pleasure; saying thereafter, as one who felt his own laughter strange: "Ay, but one who has lived as I have for so long, sometimes months away from a woman's voice, may well feel it sweet to hear his own name in the mouth of a lady. 'Tis a foretaste of the joy I shall have to hear it once more from the lips of my sister, your namesake, Lady Raydon." To which she answered nothing, being at a loss for speech, but always glad he could not see the confusion of her face. Nor did his next words make it less: "I could have thought she spoke, the little Lucy; for to my fancy—'tis but a fancy, I warrant—your voice, Lady Raydon, and hers are not unlike."

Then Lucinda, calling to mind a thing Sir Oliver had said, and not to seem too silent, replied: "It is a fashion of the day, since the King came, to be freer of speech with the christened name than was the custom formerly." And he, hearing the effort in her voice, thought it came of an apprehension that she had seemed to sanction a

like familiarity in him: and, to relieve it—for what could he know of these fashions of the day?—went off to ask questions of the Court, and of the beloved King, Charles, whose accession *de facto* had not come about till three years after his own departure for the Colony.

In such chat much of that day passed: for Lucinda, meeting little encouragement from Sir Oliver, when, as once or twice happened, she went to relieve his solitude or persuade him to be more sociable, felt warranted in giving all her society to Vincent; accompanying him, as the coolness of the evening set in, in a walk along the sea-shore, and hearing again the incidents of the fight. Wherein it was a great happiness to her that her brother, looking out seaward when she spoke of the Dutch Admiral's masts, still visible above water, exclaimed that he, too, could see them, but dimly. For he had begun to find distant objects growing clearer in his field of vision, out of proportion to the improvement of his eyesight of nearer objects, which nevertheless mended, though slowly. Now this was a great cause of rejoicing to both, even more than the gain of strength to his injured limb, and the subsiding of pain at the joint.

Therefore, when Sir Oliver reappeared at supper, making formal apology to his guest for his neglect of him, on the score of headache and a wakeful night—of which Lucinda had observed nothing—the talk soon turned on this great amelioration of Vincent's eyesight, and its good promise for the future. Sir Oliver, to make amends for his neglect, would go to the cellar and bring up one or two bottles of the fine wine of Frontignan, that was so great a favourite with his father. For there were still a few bottles left of those brought from Croxley Hall two years since, and it was but right to drink to Mr.

Mauleverer's returning eyesight in a choice draught, and ungrudgingly. Which Lucinda promised to do also, rejoicing that her lover should be in such good heart again.

Now this was a rare old wine—would open the niggard's purse and loose the tongue of secrecy itself. What wonder these three should chat freely, though two of them had cause to keep a guard on speech, and one of the three was ever on the watch against himself. And yet to outward seeming Sir Oliver was the least restrained, the most careless of them all.

"Another bumper, Mr. Mauleverer," said he. "I would you could see the colour of it—the golden ruby against the light." For Mrs. Trant, with a little waxen taper from the kitchen, was lighting up the candles in the candelabrum of Murano glass his grandfather brought from Venice in the days of Queen Mary; seeing that the coloured glass and diamond panes of the great window, looking away from the sunset, stinted the twilight it had left upon the land, and Sir Oliver had no mind to sit in the half-dark.

Said Lucinda then: "Mr. Mauleverer may yet see the colour of it ere he goes, Oliver mine, if you and he drink not the last bottles at too prodigious a pace. For I trust thee not, good Oliver—I trust thee not—and I tell thee so plainly."

"I will give thee the key of the cellar, sweet Lucy," says Oliver then, all smiles. "Thou shalt be the warden of it for the nonce. But here is my toast! May our guest have his sight again in a se'nnight. Or, for my part, by sunrise to-morrow!"

Thereupon Vincent laughs out, roundly: "Better still, Sir Oliver!"—says he. "Best of all! For then to-



morrow shall I have a sight of my dear hostess. And I will spend this night in dreaming of what she may prove to be when day comes. For no man needs his eyes to dream withal."

"And you will dream all wrong, dear Sir. My word for it! And then you will be disappointed on awakening. So dream me not too comely, Mr. Mauleverer." Lucinda's laugh rang with a full music through the house. And Susan Trant laughed aloud too, as she placed the second bottle by her master. For in those days there was not the stiffness of our later time 'twixt master and servant, and it was thought nothing that a serving-man or maid should join in with the talk at table; only, the head of the household would check such talk, if need were. Now, at this laugh of Mrs. Trant's, Sir Oliver's eye rested on her for a second, but did not stay to meet hers. And when his voice came, it had no true ring about it; neither, indeed, had the woman's laugh, which might have served for as plain a slight as she dared on her mistress's beauty. But as to his artificial manner, it meant no more, may be, than that he was acting a part.

"That were a hard task for the most skilful dreamer, Lucinda mine!" said he. "Put it not on Mr. Mauleverer to achieve it." His tone was that of a courtier's compliment. "But I, too, have an interest in his eyesight. Have I not a right to be curious as to what my friend thinks of my choice of a wench?"

Then Mrs. Trant, at the sideboard, laughed again unpleasantly, and spoke aside to her mother. But—so Lucinda thought—if old Hatsell can hear that, she can hear much folk think her deaf to.

Sir Oliver heard the laugh, and, dropping his courtier's

tone, condescended to jest with an old retainer. "Speak it up, Mistress Susan. No secrets, I pray you. . . . What was it she said, Goody Hatsell?"

The old woman heard his raised voice, and answered, "Said first choice is ever best choice, master." At which Sir Oliver could make believe to laugh. "Ho, ho, my Lucy!—dost thou hear that? First choice is best choice—who knows that better than Susan Trant?" For he felt so sure of his hearers, and that Susan's underthought would be plain to none but her mother, that he did not shrink from a trifling that amused him. And the brutal jest of a little sting for an old mistress, under the very eyes of his new love, neither knowing the other's mind, was congenial to his soul.

Now the half-blind Vincent, listening to this, was at a loss to think whether, when he left England, such talk was only unknown to him because he was but a boy, before whom some reserves would be practised; or whether, perhaps, this manner of speech, spoken by a gentleman of his wife before a guest at his own table, might not be a part of these new fashions, crept in with the new Court? Certainly, even in Virginia, strange stories were already afloat of the wild days of the young King and his former life in France. But there!—after all, what was there in Oliver's pleasantry? It came to very little, all said and done. Maybe he himself was old-fashioned.

But it gave him a discomfort, and set him a-seeking to change the conversation. He could and did tell many things of the late revolt against His Sacred Majesty—who could have dreamed then that Englishmen would live to see Members of Parliament daring in the House of Commons to stand up and side with the colonists in a still

greater revolt against their King?—and of his own wanderings in savage lands, where no white man had set foot till then. But whatever turn their conversation took, it would always drift back to the joy that would be his when he should once more set foot in the old home; where still his fancy pictured the old man his father, and the little sister of his boyhood, scarcely changed, for all his reason told him to the contrary, from the child he left eight years ago, innocent and unblemished by the world. And if it was a pang to the woman she had grown to be to sit and listen to him as he dwelt on his happy delusion, what was it to the man whose hand poured out his wines for him, in mock good-fellowship, to know that the blood of that same father was still fresh upon it? But so hardened was its owner in his sin—so unmoved by any thought but of his own safety till such time as he should weary of the woman's beauty that he now possessed body and soul—that he could fill his guest's glass and his own and show no tremor visible without; nay!—that he was even proud to do so, and could talk lightly the while, and make a parade of his indifference. Was it not a deed of honourable battle, as much so as this guest's would have been, had he slain his foe on the deck of that sunk ship over yonder? A truce to these puling regrets! He was not even the challenger!

“Which of the two shall I see the first?” cries Vincent, dwelling on the joyous anticipation. “Come, Sir Oliver, a wager! Which shall it be—father or daughter—dad or little Mayjune? Say, which will you back?—and name the odds.”

Then Lucinda's heart said to her, “Never little Mayjune again any more, in this world. Those days are gone, and can never come again.” And she answered her own

heart, and said, "Let it be so! He shall still see me, and know my love as of old. And when I am free to tell my tale, will he not forgive me, my brother? Are men so free of sin?" And then she thought to herself that, could such a man be found, it may be he would cast no stone, seeing that our Lord Himself cast none, being sinless. But how if he should say, "Go and sin no more"? Would she not answer, "My soul must die, then—for I love!"

But Sir Oliver is only weighing in his mind the safest answer he can give to Vincent's jesting proposal. "Clear me up this point," he says. "What is the meaning of 'first sight,' in your case? Suppose, for instance, the first to greet you should be your father, and the first to your eyesight your sister—how then?"

"Why, truly—I should have seen my father first. . . . Yet no!—I should see my sister—it is true."

Lucinda, at cost to herself, must join in the talk, if only for form's sake. "Mr. Mauleverer should have said *meet*, not *see*," she says. And then she gets up and goes to the window, and stands looking out to the afterglow in the west. Enough is left of it to gleam in the folds of the satin brocade of her dress, and match its colour against the mirrored candlelight within. But the hand trembles that pushes open the window-lattice, and the eyes that look out through it glisten in the light, no longer dry. Can Lucinda bear this talk—of herself, mind you!—of herself?

Sir Oliver is safe, and knows it. What can Vincent see of the tear that zigzagged down the satin brocade, as she passed him but now on her way to the window? Sir Oliver can see it, or its fellow, even as she stands, some way from him, courting the twilight. But he knows he is

safe, as his eye rests furtively upon her. She will not unsay her tale of herself, her claim to his living wife's name, and face her brother's reproach of her dishonor. So confident is he of this that he can play with the subject. His pleasantry would be devilish to her, were she not besotted with her love for him, woman-like.

"What shall we make the wager, Mr. Mauleverer? A hundred to one against the father . . . yes, I will hold to it! . . . a hundred to one in the King's new coin of Guinea gold—listen, Lucinda mine!—a hundred to one he meets not thy father first! . . ." But his speech stops with a jerk, and his face flushes hot with anger at himself for his blunder. He cares nothing for that; he knows his guest cannot see it. But he must right himself, somehow, and sees nothing better for it than to repeat, "the father, not the sister!"

For Lucinda, turning from the window with panic in her face, was crying out: "Oliver, what art thou talking of? Thou hast drunk too freely of the old French wine, foolish man! Come away, and have done with it, and I will sing thee a new song thou hast not heard." Whereupon he, thinking it best to be guided by her, suffers her to lead him, for a dizziness has mounted to his head. And Vincent follows unguided, for he can see enough to find his way, easily helped by a touch here and there, on the furniture or doorpost, or what not. He is wondering in his mind to see his host, who has drunk glass for glass with himself, to all seeming unsteady on his feet; while, lame though he be, he feels secure upon his own. But he has scarcely heeded the slip of Sir Oliver's tongue, that made such a pother but now.

Though Vincent missed the slip Sir Oliver's tongue made, there were ears that heard it in the room, other

than his. Mrs. Hatsell was back at the sideboard, unnoticed but noticing. And when she returned to the kitchen, her hands full of table-gear, her daughter, engaged upon the preparation of coffee, had a mind to know why my lady had called out so of a sudden. For she was always inquisitive and watchful of all that passed between her master and mistress.

"There'll be a tale to tell, one day, there," said her mother. "And there'll be villainy in it. And thou knowest the name of the villain, as well as I do, Sue." Then she repeated what she had heard, saying it all came of a seeming innocent wager, and that of a sudden Sir Oliver had lost his tongue and turned the colour of a red peony. Also that the Lady Lucy had caught up his speech at a word, touching of her father, or Master Mauleverer's. "Ay—but which?" asked her daughter. And then she put her mother through a close catechism, impatiently blaming her for an old fool, that she could not use her senses more, and make some shift to find out what was going on under her eyes.

But you may trust me for this, that this woman took very particular note of all she could get from her mother, comparing her tale point for point with what she already knew from the groom, John Rackham. And it shows her cunning and secretive mind, that though she laid by the knowledge she got from each, to use as occasion might arise, she said never a word of what either had told her to the other. And thereafter, by little signs and tokens, stray words of chat, and comparison of by-notes, she settled it in her mind that some untold tale was behind it all; and, more than that, John Rackham could tell it. But to make inquiry of this man was only to excite his suspicion and increase his taciturnity.



So let the story leave Susan Trant at this point, to think out, if she can, a means to get at the heart of John Rackham's secret, and go back to Lucinda and Sir Oliver and Vincent, now in the room adjoining the bedroom and Sir Oliver's private cabinet. There all that is of service for music such as Lucinda can command is to be found, rather than in the larger room of state below, which has not been used for many years past. And Lucinda, seated at her virginal, looks through a music-book to come on some song that shall meet her lover's approval, he being nice of choice, and capricious.

But if Sir Oliver was tempersome, and hard to please, what could it matter, with such a delighted listener as Vincent, whose hearing was insatiable for song after song? Those who have ever been stinted of music, for a long spell of time together, know the joy of its sweet sound breaking afresh into the arid silence. That was his case, as he sat and dwelt upon her voice and its concord with the tender notes of the virginal—a quill-struck daintiness, unlike the harsher tone of our *piano-forte*, as it is called, now becoming so common that the harpsichord and clavichord of our fathers may look to be forgotten.

But Sir Oliver struck in at about the third song.

"These are no novelties," said he. "Bring out thy new song, Lucy mine; let's have it, and no more ado!" For he was always keen to prove that some interruption was afoot to thwart his wise ruling. But Lucinda knew this way of his, and thought nothing of it. She sought among the various scrolls and sheets of written music beside her, saying: "It is just an old-time ballad to sing by the fire of a winter evening." And having found it, she sang it through, all but the last two verses, which

she omitted at a sign of impatience from Oliver, who swore he had had enough of that.

It was, indeed, a longish ballad; yet, having got thus far, it seemed unreasonable in Sir Oliver to hold out against its completion. But his reason was clear in his heart. For the ballad was a tale of a girl whose lover, having been forbidden her father's house, nevertheless receives him there, in defiance of his orders, in his absence. Whereupon he, returning unexpectedly, and finding the intruder concealed, draws his sword upon him, and pays the penalty of his rashness, being slain outright by the younger and abler swordsman.

Now Lucinda, having her face away from Oliver, who sat back in the dim light, had sung thus far through the sweet recurring music of a strange, fascinating melody—being herself taken by its charm, however much the rugged wording of the verses grated on her tongue—until she reached a point where the girl in the story strives to persuade her lover to conceal himself from her father's anger. She had just completed these verses:

“‘I cannot hide me in a withy baskét,  
Nor yet in a chest of oak,  
Nor yet in the chimney above the hearth  
For the stifling of the smoke.

“‘Let me begone by the window, sweet!  
’Tis a step to the ground below.’  
‘Nay, listen, my love, and hidden thou shalt be  
In a place that none doth know.’

“‘She has opened a wainscot-door in the wall,  
Was hidden from all men's sight.  
‘Now keep thy sword-point closer to thy side,  
That the door may shut outright.’

“Her father he looked in the withy baskét,  
And the lid of the chest raised he.  
‘Now where hast thou hidden Lord Ferrers of the Dyke,  
Whose kiss on thy lips I see?’

“He has flung the door in the wainscot wide,  
And a curse is all his speech.  
They be two strong men, with choler at heart,  
And a sword in the hand of each.”

At this point it was that Sir Oliver cried out, with seeming unreason: “What a plague is all this? Enough of it, my Lucy! Leave such stuff for ballad-mongers at a wayside inn and sing me something merry.” But his voice was not that of a man ready for mirth and did not consort well with his words. Lucinda, not seeing his face and knowing nothing of his hard-set look, and livid colour, could but laugh and say: “I have sung all my songs, sulky Oliver”—for she never scrupled to jest with him—wilt thou have them all over again? What shall it be? ‘O mistress mine, where are you roaming?’” For this was a great favourite with them, and they would speculate whether twenty—in the last verse—was the age of the lady, or the number of kisses, or both. But Oliver gave no answer beyond a short sound behind closed lips.

Vincent, however, was all agog to hear the end of the ballad-tale, and took it amiss that he should be balked of it. “Is it not hard,” said he, “to stop thus on the edge of a battle, and not know which was the better swordsman—the girl’s father or her gallant? Another wager, Sir Oliver. I back the father, for a side-stroke of compliment to my own. Never was a better rapier-thrust than his, and I’ll be bound it is so still—for what are a few years at his time of life?”

Then Lucinda all but cried out: "Oh, Vincent, pray God he never use his dreadful skill . . . !" But she stopped herself in time, though her lips had begun to form his name, saying instead: "Leave your silly wagers, good geese, and I will sing the rest of the song, for all that Oliver may say to the contrary. Now listen . . . !"

"Now God save either, or God save both,  
God, save my love,' she said.  
'For all that a woman could give have I given,  
Although that we be not wed.'

"The white swords flash, and the white swords glint,  
And the white swords glint again.  
And God hath granted the woman her prayer,  
But her father he lies there slain.

"Oh, he lies slain in his good red blood,  
And none shall hide it never.  
And none shall assoil a murderer's soul  
From the curse of God for ever."

When the song ceased, Vincent spoke out his pleasure and approval. "It was as well for me, though, Lady Raydon," said he, "that no odds were named of my wager. I might have lost a good round sum." . . . But as he chatted on thus, Sir Oliver struck in suddenly, and his voice seemed harsh and out of place in a conversation that had no tone of earnestness in it—just light words of pastime, and no more.

"A mighty wise ballad that!" cried he. "A pretty tale, that a man who slays his adversary in fair fight is a *murderer*! What shall we be told next? Shall we all be *murderers*, if by a stroke of ill-luck our man gets slain by a thrust none ever meant should kill? A point goes an inch too far, forsooth, and then a man is a *murderer*!

Who shall be safe except he sit at home and eat gruel by the fireside? No—I tell thee, Lucy, it is a foolish song, and the less one hears of such a song the better!” For Lucinda, not a little perplexed that he should take so slight a matter as a mere song to heart, had gone to sit by his side to cajole and soothe him, as was her wont in any of his fits of moroseness.

But Sir Oliver is not to be soothed, and almost makes as though to shake her off rudely. Whatever is it that should cause all this turmoil, thinks Vincent? But he can only distinguish that Lady Raydon has seated herself beside her lord on the couch he half-lay on, a moment since, listening to her song, on which he now sits forward, shunning the gentleness of her touch upon him, and wiping across his forehead with a tremulous hand. Had Vincent more eyesight, he might see how grey is Oliver’s face—how colourless his lips! But he can hear the catch in his voice, its effort to be unconcerned and still. And all for a mere ballad! Who could have guessed that his host would turn out this manner of man?—that his polished ease, his high-bred mettle, would of a sudden give place to an *hysterica passio*, a sheer affection of the nerves?

Then he hears the sweet speech of Lucinda—a sure sedative, he thinks, to this excitement. But no!—if anything, it makes it worse. For Sir Oliver turns round upon the ballad, venting his anger on the puppets of the story, just as though they were truly living creatures. “I will none of it, I tell thee!” he shouts. “And what was the fool of a girl about, to hide the fellow away in the wainscot? Could she not have known her father would know all the rat-holes better than she? Serve her well right for her folly, say I.” . . . And he mutters

on to himself, with a shouted word now and again, out of all measure or proportion to the cause that has provoked it.

Vincent, half-ready for a laugh, but keeping it back lest this should be some strange distemper of his host's brain—well known to his wife, but such as she might easily have said nothing of, for prudence' sake—would gladly help her, if he might, but feels the ground insecure beneath him. Still, he may go so far as to say: "What are they all, dear Sir Oliver, but just the puppets of a galanty show at a fair to amuse children?" Then at an uneasy laugh from Sir Oliver—for it caught in his throat—he adds: "To my thought, the old man was the fool to cross swords at all with a young ruffler. Unless, indeed, he could use his weapon like my father. And where would this gay young minx have been the better had her lover been the dead man?"

Sir Oliver made a better laugh of this, and drew a breath of ease. "Well spoken, Mr. Mauleverer," he said. "He'd had his will, I take it. But he never could wed the girl with a sword through his guts."

"But need he have died of it—need he have died?" cried Lucinda, in such a taking about the ballad-folk that Vincent could not but wonder, as she went on: "For my own part, I am sorriest for the girl, sinner though she were, as the word of the world is. Oh, but think of it, Oliver mine!—to see her own father lying there in a pool of his own blood, and the man she, like enough, loved standing by with his guilty sword!" Then she mistook the odd sound that came from Oliver for some sort of protest or dissent, and must needs go on. "Nay, but fancy it, dearest love!—had'st *thou* slain *my* father, and I stood by to see it . . ."



But she gets no farther, for Oliver, starting up from where he sat beside her, with an awful cry, stands for one moment rigid, then falls headlong, foaming at the mouth and writhing. And his mouth is all awry, and his eyes have gone upward, just as they did on that night of his sleep-waking a month since. Of this, though, Vincent sees nothing; but he can see this much—that Sir Oliver is on the floor, and Lady Raydon is kneeling over him, loosing his collar at the throat for air.

Then a thing happened that a many persons—and those, too, not uninformed on matters of the like sort—may easily cry out upon as a thing impossible. For as Vincent, dumb-stricken, and almost dizzy at the terrible unearthly sound of the epileptic's cry, stands unable to help for lack of serviceable eyesight, as well as for the impediment of his hurt, all that he half-sees becomes suddenly clear to his vision, and for the first time he has more than a mere guess what this host of his is like, and what this owner of a lovely voice. In a word—and so strange a tale will not be made less so by lengthening of it out—he can see in a flash, as it were, the whole image of the room before him, and he wonders—will it go or stay? But he has no need to fear; it will hold. There it is still!—Lucinda kneeling in her beauty by the writhing, jerking figure on the floor; the women of the household, hurried would-be helpers with no succour to give; the last word of the sunset through the open lattice; the candles on the spinet guttering to their end in the warm night-wind; the music-sheets scattered about. He who, a moment since, saw but dim images, as through a mountain mist, can now discern well and clearly, as though his eyesight had never been at fault.

Being thus free of all impediment, his maimed limb

apart, should not his first thought be the offer of some help at need, even though the manner of it may be hard to choose? If it be so, it is a thought that never comes to action. For he remains speechless and motionless, his eyes fixed upon the kneeling woman, as though something his new power of sight brought with it had struck him dumb. And she, for her part, in her despair at this bitter grief, this sudden resurrection of a foe she had dared to think dead, seeing nothing but the seeming agony of the face she loves, contorted by the cruel malady she cannot understand, has no heart to ask or hope for help from him. What can he do, or any man? What may be done she does, with ready presence of mind. Cold water for the brow, and the palms of hands hard to unclench—freedom for the throat, and a cork, as the doctor had told her, to keep the teeth from the already bitten tongue and clear the way for breath, and there is the whole of her resources in a few words. And now nothing is left but to send Mrs. Trant to despatch John Rackham to ride full-speed for assistance, first of all to Bury, though her belief is small indeed in the medical help to be had there or elsewhere. Still, it should be summoned, for what other can she hope for?

The fit subsides, and, as before, Sir Oliver lies breathing heavily where he fell, and she fears to have him moved. Nor would anything be gained by doing so. Raise his head on pillows, and wait! Nothing else can be done; all human succour is at a loss. The fiend that has possessed him—for that is all her thought, not knowing its folly as we know it now in our day—will leave him free, in God's own time. For us, what is left but patience?

Then she turns to Vincent, never dreaming he can see

her, still less that in a moment he will know her. At the moment so dumbfounded is he with bewilderment, he cannot be truly said to know anything.

All his bewilderment is in his voice. "In Heaven's name, who and what are you?" And the eyes that she still supposes to see her but dimly are fixed upon her in all intelligence, but with terror in them, or something like it.

Her first thought is despairing. Is there no God in Heaven that this should be the moment chosen for the climax of her perplexity—for the forcing of a confession to her brother? Her words are only: "Oh, but why this? . . . why now? . . ." Could not the blow have struck her, she would say, at a less afflicted moment?

Then in an instant he sees nothing but her pain, and the solution of the mystery—look you!—can wait.

"Not now—not now!" he cries. "Let it bide. Let it be what it may! Count me as nothing, for the love of God!" And his words are not so wild but that she can understand them. No thought of him is to add a bitterness to her bitter lot—is not that his meaning?

She can see that he sees her more visibly than heretofore. But she has no conception how plain his sight has suddenly become. She thinks, at least, that the tears that are obscuring her own vision; the rise and fall of her bosom as she gasps to speak, but cannot; her hands that hang so helpless till some slight convulsion shows her distress through their inaction—that all these are unseen by him, who really sees them plainly, with pity in his heart, but a mazed understanding, so far.

For a moment all remains unchanged. It is a moment of acute silence for both, through which is audible the heavy stertorous breathing of the man on the floor.

Lucinda is the one to break it. She cannot reason now of what is best to say. He may know nothing yet; but she knows he has to know all soon, and why not now? One way of knowledge is like another, and his comes to him with the name of his boyhood, spoken through a torrent of pleading for forgiveness, a passionate cry of remorse from a soul in torture. Oh, how could he have been so deaf as not to know that voice?—so dull as to be none the wiser for his own glint of insight into its likeness to his sister's, more than once ere this?

Then Mrs. Hatsell, coming stealthily to replace a wax candle near its end in the window-draught, sees Lady Raydon fall into the arms of her guest, and hears her agonized cry: "Vincent—Vincent—you *must* forgive me!—you *shall* forgive me!" She sees the kiss of his forgiveness—for what offence she knows not—and the welcome of his arms, and gets away unnoticed, with a tale to tell her daughter.

Had Vincent's recognition of his sister come at some happier moment, might he not have withheld the forgiveness so ungrudgingly given? Had his first perception that this Lady Raydon, the teller of a false tale of her own parentage, was in truth his own little Mayjune he was longing to greet—had this come upon him as a revelation of her lawless disregard of all moral duty, her indulgence of a sinful passion fraught with a thousand dishonors to a family so little blemished as their own, it may easily be that her confession and plea for pardon would have been met by a storm of angry reproach. Had he seen her first as one of a gay throng of rakes who had thrown all sacred obligation, all purity of love, to the four winds of Heaven—and coteries of such-like

folk were no harder to find in those days than in our own—the first word from his lips to the sister the memory of whose childhood he had treasured in all his wanderings might easily have been some brutal epithet containing a falsehood, such as a society of liars and hypocrites bestows so freely on the woman who transgresses laws womankind have had no share in making, with only a lenient word of formal blame for the male transgressor, of whom she may have been the half-unwilling victim. But Lucinda's cry of contrition, her appeal for lenient judgment, came to him in no such guise. It was mixed with her despair for the dire calamity he now saw for the first time, for a lover stricken down with one of the cruellest afflictions man has to bear at the hands of God; and all his pious instincts towards reproof of sin were, so to speak, caught at a disadvantage, and overcome for the moment by his sorrow for the pitiful plight of this his dearly loved sister and friend.

So soon as his utter bewilderment would allow him to understand it, Lucinda told her tale—one in which her own almost childish ignorance of the nature of the step she was taking played even a larger part than is common in such stories, though, like enough, the girl had not been kept more in the dark than the world, for its own purposes, has decided to be wisest for all girls. But so skilfully did she gloss over the wicked cunning Sir Oliver had practised in entangling her, so much self-blame did she impute, so persistently did she dwell on the reciprocity throughout of an ill-restrained passion—guilty, perhaps, but of like guilt for both, and irresistible by either—that her brother could not speak his hatred of her seducer without seeming to include her in the scope of his condemnation. For all through the telling of her

story he was burning to say: "Right or wrong, I am on my little sister's side. If Law and Custom be against her, I appeal to God. If God be against her, I cast my lot in with hers, and take part, if need be, with the Devil."

It is true that no memory of past lapses of his own had any share in this impulse; it was entirely due to his devotion to his sister. But, then, he was a Man.

What should he say to that thing on the floor that he at last knew for a villain, his sister's betrayer? Nothing, here and now. How *could* he speak to the slow-returning consciousness of one half-witted from the overwhelming paroxysms of epilepsy? How hope for a sane answer from his thickened speech and clouded thought? Not yet—wait a while! Not even when Oliver, denying, as before, that time had lapsed, and refusing, as before, all help but John Rackham's, had been got safely to bed had Vincent a word to say to him of his villainy. His few words of formal farewell, and wishes for a night of sound sleep for his host, had no colour in them of a gravity not warranted by the tragic interruption to a peaceful evening. Nor on any of the few days left of his stay at Kips Manor—for on the second day after this he was fit to mount a horse, and only delayed a day or two longer for prudence—did he utter one syllable to Oliver of the matter nearest his heart. And the sadness that ruled the house was nowise strange, considering the evil hap of its master, and its persistency of oppressive effect on him.

But when the day came for him to ride away to his father's home, strong in hope that ere long he would ride back, bearing at least some message from that father to his daughter, if not the full forgiveness such an offence



could scarcely find a plea for—then at last Vincent spoke. He had started on his journey, as men rode on such journeys in those days, with spurs to his jack-boots he might need to use, for speed of flight or pursuit; with pistols loaded ready at his saddle-bow, and a sword of tried service—all the loan of his host, as was all else he carried with him, and the horse he sat upon. Beside him rode Oliver, quite himself again after that queer fit, a week since, to conduct his guest as far as the main road upon his way, after which no guide would be necessary, all the stages of his route being well marked and easy of inquiry, besides a good chance of other company. According as this may turn out, John Rackham, who rides behind, will accompany him farther or return. There was no mount for Lucinda, the young colt still proving too troublesome for a lady's hand, and her own mare being needed for Vincent, caution being still desirable, his hurt being so recent.

“Listen, before we part, Sir Oliver Raydon,” says he. “You have been a good host to me, and I am your debtor for a many courtesies. But you are a damned villain, and shall one day answer for your crime against me and mine. For I know the whole story, and, though my sister's love is yours, I know you for what you are. Do you call upon me to make good my words? If so, here and now . . .” And he would have dismounted, but Sir Oliver stopped him.

“Keep your saddle, Mr. Mauleverer. I should gain little honour by crossing swords with a lame man, even though I myself be none of the fittest for a bout after this accursed attack. But do not fear. A time will come, suitably for both, unless, indeed, you are minded to go back on a hot word spoken in anger. I will overlook

it, for my part, and so farewell, and a pleasant ride home, and a good welcome!" It cost an effort to get this said.

"Never a word will I unsay," said Vincent; and he saw that the other flinched, but had no guess why. "But look you, now!—here is a bargain. I have no wish to run my sword through a man my sister is so besotted about. I would rather call him brother. But a day may come when she too may measure you right, and her craze be at an end. Count our meeting postponed till that day. I have this much faith in you, Sir Oliver Raydon—that I do not believe you will dishonor a pledge from cowardice. Promise me but this, that my challenge shall stand until Lucy tires of you, and till then—soon may it be!—I will not claim it."

"Agreed!" said Sir Oliver. But then he thought to himself, "How about his father's death, when he comes to know it?" So, after hesitating a moment, he added: "Let us have the compact clear, with a witness, though he be but a groom." He signed to John Rackham, who came; then continued: "It is to be thus, I take it, Mr. Mauleverer: no challenge shall hold good against me until my lady wearies of me, and would be quit of my service. Thus and no otherwise—is that it?"

"Thus and no otherwise!" echoes Vincent. But then, having misinterpreted Oliver's pause, he adds this sub-intent: "The pledge is mine only; my father is not held by it. I have no right to bind him." He had wondered, when Lucinda told her tale, that no word came in of a challenge from the old swordsman, her father.

"I understand it so, and am content." So says Sir Oliver. But his eye meets not Vincent's, as he turns to ride away, and neither says farewell. There is a malicious grin on the groom's colourless lips as he turns his horse

to follow his master, with the barest sign of obeisance to the departing guest.

As for Vincent, how can his heart be aught but a heavy one when he thinks back on the home he hoped to find, and contrasts it with the one he now expects. Alas!—he does not know the worst. He rides on over the green roadside turf, with a wheel-track of no great width in the centre, and the hedges sometimes flanking it close, then opening wide, as was the way in those days even with the highways of some importance. He rides on, stooping now and again when a tree-bough, dropping too low, threatens his head, and indulging the thought of the welcome the Old Hall may still give him—of his father's face with the burden on it of a grief to tell—a tale already told. But why—why—had no answer come to Lucinda's letters? Ay!—even to his own; though shortness of time may have had to answer for that.

He who writes this—partly with a free pen and partly as an abstract of a record of more than a hundred years ago, too full of the author's reflections to warrant the cost of reprinting at length—is not well enough informed about maladies of the eyesight to know whether so sudden a revival of vision as Vincent Mauleverer's is a common case. All he can vouch for is that it stands so in the narrative, and that he has inclined in this portion to leave its language unchanged, rather than to modify it with a view to softening seeming improbability. As it was written, so it is reported, and the responsibility for its truth or falsehood must rest with its first writer.

## CHAPTER XII

NEVER had Oliver been more silent and morose than in the days following the departure of Vincent. He was brooding over what he now thought his own folly, in not at once catching at a challenge that might have had a fortunate outcome for him. Another thrust, like that hasty one he repented of daily, would have sent the son to follow the father, and relieved him—not from the burden of guilt—but from the apprehension of a premature revelation; one that would turn Lucinda against him before the natural flagging of his own passion had made him ripe for some new adventure elsewhere.

What has he gained by his postponement of a duel that must needs be fought when Vincent learns the truth? His mind flinched from an image it conjured up of an opponent no longer balked by a crippled limb, swift of hand and keen of sight, with two great wrongs to avenge—a sister's dishonor and a father's murder. And he himself with nothing then to fight for! For he knew in his heart that Lucinda's strange love for him would then be changed to loathing. What a miserable fool's pledge he had given—to play a game of life or death with his chief stake swept off the board! Better—far better!—they should have cleared the score, then and there, on the hill yonder.

The best might-have-been his thoughts could frame was one of himself, borne back after such an encounter with an expiatory wound on him—bad enough for the

purpose, but not too bad—and then a full confession of the whole to this mistress he was more than half in love with by now, in spite of his normal incapacity for love. For his imagination did not scruple to trade on the pity Lucinda had store of in her heart, and to utilise it for the easing of an embarrassment. It would work all right, that way, and be of service to him. This blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of Love was constant with him. And repellent as was the frame of mind that made it possible, it contained also the germ of the only possibility of life and growth to his self-centred soul; the heart-stretch he had to acknowledge the existence of towards a woman who was to have been but an item of his passing pleasures. Lucinda's beauty, her overpowering grace and sweetness, had stolen a march on him; and he bade fair to become a prisoner in the citadel himself had captured. Else he might have shaken himself as free of her as he was of that discarded Susan, who was losing her beauty now, and knew it.

Then an indignant impatience with the creator of human maladies, whom he could not reach, found some easement in denunciations of the Faculty of Medicine, which was relatively near at hand, for its ignorance of the nature and treatment of disease. But then a thought occurred to him:—Was this affliction of his an ordinary disease—fair play on Nature's part—or had the Devil a hand in the matter? Was he bewitched? Such things had been. But a few years since the smell of burning witches was over the whole land, and these eastern shires had been tainted with the contagion almost beyond all others.

Who would the offender be in this case? Well—he had not far to seek for that. All the countryside knew

how narrowly Mistress Trant had escaped being swum for a witch three years ago; and, though Sir Oliver himself had been mainly instrumental in rescuing her from the clutches of Matthew Hopkins, the great witch-finder, he was never convinced that the accusations against her were false. He recalled the confessions this woman had made—to avoid torture, certainly—and among other things that a chief accusation against her was that of afflicting a neighbour's children with fits. His own case—that was strange!

If it were so, no need to fancy—as he half-confessed to himself he had done—that his witnessing from afar that encounter on the ship's deck had made him hesitate to cross swords with the surviving combatant. What folly! Be sure it was that accursed malady that had eaten into his system, and made him half the man he was three months ago! That was it! It was witchcraft. It was some devil's practice of that green-eyed snake of a woman. What was a woman's jealousy not capable of? And what a return for all he had done for her! Would she ever have been an honest woman at all, but for him?

Sir Oliver jumped at this witchcraft theory, having little relish for suspicion of his own cowardice. He was not long in making up his mind that his discarded mistress was the culprit, and that it was some accursed witch-philtre of hers that was answerable for this falling sickness. She had motive enough. It must be plain now to her woman's quick apprehension that all those little aftermaths of a lawless love, nominally secret from her official possessor, would have to come to an end. She would not need to believe in the decay of her own charms for that; what woman is convinced of that at forty? But what a hatred must hers be for Lucinda!



Then a thought stopped him short. When his first seizure occurred, what did this Susan know of Lucinda? Simply nothing! But had that anything to do with the matter? In this subject of witchcraft all reasoning was at fault. We knew nothing of the conditions. How could he tell that some imp, some familiar, had not carried the news of all his doings, or even that the witch herself had not travelled invisible? Tales enough were abroad of like things happening. Rather, was it not more reasonable to assume Susan's supernatural knowledge of things at a distance, and account for it by her being in league with the Devil? Fancy accepting a plea of an *alibi* from a witch!

But if Oliver, dwelling on this way of accounting for his malady, as well as on the growing difficulty of keeping his mistress in ignorance of her father's death, became more and more silent and distraught, it was another story with Lucinda. All the heart of her youth was back in her veins, now she knew that she must ere long be once more in touch with her father. Fancy seeing him again! Fancy feeling his arms about her as of old, and hearing his dear voice, even though it spoke plainly to her of her own misdeed, and stooped to no false palliation of it for her sake. And then, too, what a joy to have her brother, as it were, on her side—to be spared the first confession of her sin to her father, face to face! That would have been terrible. She looked to it now as a certainty that his letter would come soon—this dreadful silence would end. Not that his reproaches would not sting. That was inevitable. But anything—anything, rather than this condemnation without speech, this dumb and stupid void of cold speculation!

“Oh, Heaven, speed my brother on his mission!”

That was her hourly thought. And she made up a thousand ways in her mind how Vincent would arrive at the Old Hall, and how he would be welcomed. Now, it was under the canopy of a starlit night, like that above the still sea yonder; and she could almost hear the tramp of his steed on the stones of the court of the Old Hall—could almost hear his joyous voice shouting aloud to his father to come, to wake and come, and see how the boy of eight years since had become a man. And then she would dream, when the morning sun was making so much gold of the lichens and stonecrop on the grey Manor House, that, even at the moment, father and son had met, maybe in the rose-garden that was called her own, maybe in the lane—anywhere! Oh, the morning air of the Old Hall gardens, scent-laden with southernwood and lavender, thyme and mignonette, so unlike this sweet, salt desert by the sea!

But whatever form her dream took, it was always crossed by the pain in her father's voice, uttering her name as the first thing to speak of; yet again alleviated by the sound of her brother's, that—so she would have it—was to say boldly: "I have seen my sister, I have been beneath her roof; and if all is not well, all is not so ill but that I can take her part against the world, and feel no shame in doing so." So she dreamed on, and the days went by; it was a little lull of rest with a privilege of hope in it, a right that was hers through all the time in which no letter from her brother could possibly reach her. She made the most of it, and hid in the very back of her heart a misgiving that she might soon be at a loss to invent reasons for this letter's non-arrival.

How vexatious it was of Oliver that he should, just now of all times, begin to scheme a journey to London!

He had not hinted before of any departure from Kips Manor, either for their previous home or for London, until mid-August at least. If she were dragged away on any pretext before Vincent had time to write—and she could imagine reasons why he might not write at once—how long would it be before his letter, forwarded, would reach her? It might never do so.

She tried to coax Oliver to promise postponement of their departure until letters from the Old Hall should arrive; but he always evaded the subject, pooh-poohing her anxiety, and saying another day, or two at most, would be sure to put an end to it. He showed impatience when she referred to it again; whereupon she, bearing in mind his recent attack and Dr. Phinehas's warning that he was not to be thwarted, determined not to speak of it again; to Oliver himself, at any rate.

But she could not even feel sure no time would be lost in the forwarding of this letter when it came. In fact, she had serious misgivings that it might lie unclaimed at the Cobbler with Two Wives when John Rackham was no longer at hand to ride over there, as he now did regularly twice in the week. Sir Oliver was not communicative about the arrangements that would be made for forwarding letters in his absence. All she knew, so far, was that after their departure Susan Trant would return to her husband at his farm, and Martha Hatsell would remain in charge of the house as heretofore. But Trant's Farm was only an easy distance from the Cobbler with Two Wives, and at this time Lucinda had no doubt of Mrs. Trant's good faith and trustworthiness, whatever may have been the case later.

"Now listen to me, Mistress Susan," said she, to her attendant a few days after her brother's departure. "Sir

Oliver has set his heart on a visit to London, and that in spite of the tales they tell of the plague that has fallen on the people there. He is headstrong, and cannot be dissuaded."

"He was so from a boy," said Susan. "What is your ladyship's wish?"

"'Tis a small matter, but must be done without fail. There will come letters for me when we are gone, there where John Rackham rides now to fetch them. You live near by?—is it not so?"

"The Cobbler Inn? Yes—one can go on foot, within the half-hour. Mr. Isaac Trusslove."

"That is his name, who has charge over the letters? . . . Well!—he will give you mine; for, as I suppose, he knows you. Write on them the new address—'Mrs. Jane Worbidge.'" . . .

"I cannot write."

"Never mind, Mr. Trusslove will write it, if you tell him. Now keep it well in memory. 'Care of Mrs. Jane Worbidge, over the barber's shop in Panyer Alley, by Ivy Lane.'" And she made Mrs. Trant repeat this once or twice, so there should be no mistake. Why she did not write it down for her was in order that no question should be made about it over the borrowing of a pen from Sir Oliver; she herself having none, but always seeking his. And Lucinda knew well that folk who cannot write have a keener use of memory than such as can jot down at will every trifle, to keep it in mind.

Now, the name Lucinda had given—that of an old nurse whom she was sure to seek out if she did go to London—was only chosen because she had no knowledge of where Sir Oliver would lodge, he having said nothing of his arrangements so far. She had no mistrust of her

own letters being forwarded with his, if there were any; but as he expected none he would very likely not give his London address to the local postmaster at all, relying on his despatching them to the Old Hall, whence they would be sent to him with any others. Lucinda's sole object was to gain every moment of time possible; not to be without her brother's letter, or her father's, one single instant beyond necessity. In her nervous anxiety for this, she quite lost sight of a possible interpretation of her wish to have her letters sent to an address apart.

"Now, you will be sure not to let it slip," said she, and began repeating again, "Mrs. Jane Worbidge, in Panyer Alley, over the barber's shop . . ." But Mrs. Trant said, somewhat severely, "I heard it, my lady," and was silent.

This woman's reserve would relax with her mother, and they would be heard talking freely when the door was closed, the old woman's shrill treble often cut short by the firm dry speech of her daughter, whose voice was not unmusical, however incisive. So Lucinda heard them talking afar, disputatiously, as she passed through the vestibule, to join Oliver without, after giving her charge to Susan Trant.

For the daughter had said to her mother, returning to the kitchen: "Thou art astray touching the sailor-guest and my lady. They would be a strange-fangled sister and brother to kiss o' that fashion." And then, though her mother spoke not, only looked, "Of what fashion, forsooth?—why, the one thou tellest of! . . . No!—I care nothing what they called each other. Names be no better than toys to play with. You're all in the wrong of it, mother. Brother and sister—a likely story!" But she said this only to make her mother tell again what she

had seen and heard of Vincent's recognition of his sister; having believed up till now, from John Rackham's information about Lucinda's maiden name—which, however, she had kept to herself—that the inferences drawn about their relationship were correct. This separate address of Lucinda's threw a doubt upon them, in a mind prone to suspicion, and set it a thinking whether a useful jealousy might not be excited in Sir Oliver by a judicious revelation of the postal instruction Lucinda had given. But she had to be sure of her ground.

"You may forsooth me, daughter, and make light of all I say. But I tell thee this—all brothers are not like thine, who would as soon have given thee a clout as a kiss, and all sisters are not like thee, to count a brother's kiss a dose of medicine." Thus the old woman. Who, then, being pressed, resumed the tale she had already told, and added other recollections of conversation overheard between Lucinda and Sir Oliver, all tending to show that her lady and Mr. Mauleverer, who came off the wreck, were truly sister and brother, whatever Mrs. Trant's early experience of fraternal relations may have been.

All which her daughter listened to and passed by, saying, with an ugly curl of her top lip: "Then our Sir Oliver goes to a lodgment in London over a barber's shop! A likely story!" . . . Then for explanation, being asked, she gave the tale of the new direction, and ended with the question: "What entertainment may there be for breeding of high quality in Panyer Alley, over a barber's shop? Thou knowest town, mother, as I do not, that have never set foot there. What sort of an alley is Panyer Alley, that Sir Oliver Raydon of Croxley Hall should dwell there, over a barber's shop? But of a truth, I know nothing." Neither did her mother seem wiser than she,



as to Panyer Alley, never having heard of it. But her ignorance of it told against Panyer Alley, for had she not in youth been in the service of quality in London, and known all the quarters where the gentry congregated in those days—St. James's and Piccadilly, and eastward along the Strand—but had never heard speak of such a place as fit residence for gentlefolk. However, it might be in the City itself, eastward of Temple Bar. But as to why my lady should want her letters sent there if it were not Sir Oliver's own proper address, there could be but one reason. And this was certain, that Mrs. Hatsell had overheard her to say to this brother or what not, just before his departure, that she should be miserable until his letter came, charging him to write quickly.

The end of it was that Mrs. Trant, whatever her actual belief was, saw a way to utilising the worst construction she could put on the unsuspecting freedom of Lucinda's intercourse with her guest, and rejoiced over it in her heart. But she wished to know all she could know first; to be complete mistress of the position. The groom Rackham was the only person who could have anything to tell, and Susan's attempt upon his confidence had only scored a few small successes. Ale, to which she had looked to loosen his tongue and make him less reticent, had only made him more and more so; until, at the point where most men would be helplessly drunk, Mr. Rackham stopped, as a clock stops. But the face of a stopped clock is an expressive thing compared to Mr. Rackham's when drunk; for at least it repeats its last statement for what it was worth; and once accurately, if it was beforehand at the moment of stopping. His was an irritating silence always seeming to refer to the thing you wanted to know, whatever it might be.

But Mrs. Trant outmatched him in the end, as we shall see, by what agency it is not for the story to determine. Yet it is only reasonable to suppose that if the evil deeds that none can doubt are committed by persons accused of witchcraft, even in these days, are due to the intervention of the Evil One, this practice of Mrs. Trant on the groom, John Rackham, was one of a like colour. We may refuse belief to many such legends as abound in the confessions of culprits tried for witchcraft, such as those of familiar spirits—Pyewacket or Grizzel Greedigut—braget cats or little bloodsucking black men, incubi or succubi or the like. But it is almost as hard to believe that an influence over an obdurate man, forcing him to the narrative of secret matter wholly against his will, should be attained by means so simple as those she employed, except those means were in some sense diabolical. It does not need to assume the intervention of the arch-fiend Satan in person, seeing that the agencies he employs may be well counted by millions. But it is noteworthy that this Susan Trant had already been under such suspicion of malpractices of this sort, that even her former paramour, Sir Oliver, while throwing his weight and influence into the scale against that of the Witch-finder Hopkins, had never entirely acquitted her in his own heart. And now, being in doubt as to the cause of his malady, his mind harked back to the old tales against her of the children she had afflicted with fits, ulcers, and so on, especially the former.

John Rackham, it may be supposed, had heard chance gossip about Mrs. Trant's evil repute, else it would never have occurred to him to seek advice from her about a perplexity he found himself in. He, being unable to account for the vices and wildness of the young colt he

had so much difficulty in breaking-in, ended by deciding that it was bewitched. A thief may be set to catch a thief, and a witch a witch. But Susan Trant, being consulted, told Mr. Rackham he was no better than a born fool to think such a thing. Perhaps, though, said she, he had other reasons that he had not told. He was not a person to be profuse in information until some form of contradiction or hostility came into the question.

"What will you call fool for next, Mistress Susan? Study your words afore you speak 'em, say I. Mean to tell me when a horse is stalled safe overnight, and streaming with a muck o' sweat in the morning, that the Devil's at a distance? I say no!"

"I say like enough. Why not? Witch-wives must have a busy time, to answer for every little ailment. Some will have it a body can't sneeze but a witch is to be answerable. Any old dame with a cat will do—one as soon as another."

"You're wise with a wench's wisdom, Mistress Sukey—your tongue gets ahead of your knowledge. Now, if you had but bided for a word I'd have told you."

"What would you have told me? Nothing worth the hearing, I lay." She was ironing fine cambric, and talked of things of small account the while, with slight interest. It exasperated Mr. Rackham, who was no match for her on even terms.

"I'd have told you *this*," said he, moved to emphasis, short of anger, for which he was too torpid. "I'd have told you that when the mane of a three-year-old colt, or e'er a horse you may name, is tied in strands so no comb passes through, do what you will, that young colt's been hag-rid in the night. You may naysay it, mistress, but it's well known for a truth by all who have charge of

horses. My father knew it afore me, and no man called un a liar, in his day . . . what might you make of that?" He had said a good deal, for him; and had done justice to his case without posing as a petitioner for what he considered a professional opinion.

Mrs. Trant felt she could tantalize him; perhaps that might be her best policy. "I have heard tell of that," said she, placidly ironing a careful corner. There she stopped. She was considering whether she could not utilise this fulcrum of the horse-incident to extract the information she wanted. A lever was known to her, could she get the chance to apply it. She completed the corner before she spoke again. "They're a strong and a wicked sort," said she; "but they do say there be remedies against them, too!"

The old groom, leaning with his elbows on the window-ledge of the kitchen, grinned maliciously on one side of his face and crimped the eye that belonged over the grin. "I'd make a sharp remedy if I could find the old cat," said he. "But who's to say where to find un?"

"Who—alas?" said Mrs. Trant. But then she went to the window over against John Rackham, and as she stood against the inner side of the thick wall, spoke to him under her breath. "Listen to me, Master Rackham. This is no fable I am telling you. If you will be guided by me, I will put you in the way to know of this witch that has done ill to your horse—who she may be, and her name. But you must stand pledged to follow my bidding in all things."

Mr. Rackham's usually immovable face showed symptoms of alarm. "No raising of the Devil, mistress," said he. "I bar that." But she, facing him near over the window-sill, makes a jest of this pusillanimity of his,

and as though to take him still nearer to the bosom of her confidence, says, "What!—do I look as though I had to do with the Devil? Look on my face and see!"

Now in all this, which is dwelt upon especially for that reason, it seems to us that Mrs. Trant—whatever she may have practised of other sorceries later on this coarse but weak-minded man—used no other enchantment but the very ancient witchcraft woman has practised on man since the beginning of time. Which of us but is wax in the hands of a woman who says, "This way—come!" who wraps him round with the warmth of her voice; who distinguishes him on her own behalf from his neighbour? We all know this is so, even sometimes in cases where beauty is lacking; and Susan was still any eye's pleasure that rested on her, as her mistress would often think, over her image in the mirror, when engaged about her tiring-work.

But this preliminary enthrallment of Mr. Rackham's susceptibilities, or such as remained to him at his time of life, was only a means to an end. Susan, having, as it were, her fish on the hook, as she made her bargain with him in undertones across the window-ledge, promised to show him an image of the witch who was at the bottom of his stable-troubles, on certain conditions. He was to undertake at midnight on Lammas Day—very shortly, that is—having neither eaten nor drunk since midday, to come prepared to follow her directions in all things to that same kitchen, when she would show him that witch's visible image in a magic glass or crystal. She could not, however, give him any certainty that the name of its original should be made known to him. That might depend on whether he could himself identify her—or him,

as might be; for this mischief might be the work of no witch, but a wizard.

For the present relief of the evil to the young horse she knew of but one thing that was entirely infallible in freeing sufferers from the molestations of witchcraft, namely, the constant wearing of a sufficient diamond; but though this would apply alike to horse and man, there was no diamond obtainable, it being out of the question to get at the ring on her ladyship's finger for such a purpose, as Mr. Rackham must see of his own judgment. But an alleviation of the evil was possible. She would get some vervain or verbena from the garden at her own home, seeing she was going there on a visit to-morrow; and this, made into a decoction in hot water, and sprinkled over the animal and its stable, might render the operations of the witch more difficult, or defeat them altogether.

It so turned out, doubtless by the merest accidental coincidence, that on the day following the employment of this precious necromantic remedy of vervain, the young colt had a fit of great docility; so much so that my lady could use him as a mount, riding with Sir Oliver across country southward as far as what are called "The Levels," where horse and rider may enjoy a gallop alike. So tractable was he and obedient to the rein that his rider could promise herself ease in his saddle on her journey back to the New Hall.

This docility, it may be imagined, made a great impression on John Rackham, and convinced him that Susan Trant had not been falsely accused of witchcraft. And the worse a witch was Susan, the better pleased was John. All his hope was that hers was no false boast, and that she would really be able to put him on the trail of the witch that had ridden his horse, and inflicted upon



him all this perplexity and trouble. The evil influence was baffled for the moment by the vervain, but revenge would be sweet. Short of burning at the stake there were correctives; such, for instance, as placing the culprit naked in a sack with a tom-cat, and dragging the sack through a pond. Or, pricking over all, to test whether the devil had left no spot insensitive to a fair thrust of a cobbler's needle; but that would be done in any case.

So it was with an eager anticipation, mixed, it may be, with an occasional slight misgiving, that Mr. Rackham presented himself on Lammas Eve at near midnight to claim the performance of Mrs. Trant's promise. Now, remember always that this woman's secret motive was to get at the root of his knowledge of things half-betrayed to her suspicious watchfulness already, and confirmed by her mother's chance-hearing of Lucinda's words or Sir Oliver's at times when each conceived her deaf or inattentive.

The room, used only as a kitchen in these days, was, in fact, the old banquet-hall of the spacious manor-house, built in the days of Henry the Eighth, and formerly used for both kitchen and the daily meals of the household. Its furnishing was scanty now as against what it had been in the days of its prosperity, when it was on the outskirts of a busy town of cloth-weavers and fisherfolk. But, measured by the needs of the present inmates and of all possible guests—for Oliver's use of this house was rather as a place of refuge from his surroundings elsewhere than for the entertainment of his friends—it was ample even to luxury. The silver that gave back the expiring flicker of the logs on the great open hearth, ranged on the buffet-shelves it faced, outmatched the pewter trenchers on the shelves above, when Mr. Rackham, true to his appoint-

ment, found Mrs. Trant and her mother awaiting him.

Never were the surroundings of an appointed tryst less like sorcery! The savour of ham or bacon simmering over the fire in a great iron pot was, in its homeliness, enough to stamp the place innocuous, and give it absolution of all sinister purpose. Only the time was out of gear. For in those days folk grudged candle-light and oil for lamps, sleeping and rising early, and leaving the hours of darkness undisturbed by work or leasing-making, unless it were for occasions of great festivity. So that a midnight appointment, for any honest purpose, was an unwonted occurrence.

"What said my lady to thee but now?" said the mother to the daughter, just before the incoming of their visitor. To which the answer was: "I told her the ham would spoil if it kept not on the fire for another hour, and that I would bear you company. And on that she said 'good-night!'" And then Mr. Rackham tapped on the window, asking whether it was not nigh midnight, and was invited in. He blew out the light in a great lantern he carried, but still paused, looking in through the open lattice.

"You'll have to be my surety this is no bedevilment, Mistress Sukey," said he.

"What ails the man, to be talking about bedevilments?" The woman spoke in a genial, rallying manner she could assume at times. "Nothing venture, nothing have, Master Rackham! What!—will you not risk a little to catch this witch-wife? Then leave it and go, for me. But the chance is lost if the clock strikes."

The groom appeared to reflect. His fear of some uncanny complication of sorcery—not on the score of its

unholiness, but of its possible inconvenience or danger—was contending with his anxiety to avenge himself for the pranks some old harridan in league with the Devil had played on his horse. He grunted and hesitated, but ended by walking into the house.

Said Mrs. Susan then: "We have no time to lose, Master Rackham. 'Tis an easy matter, for your part of it at least. Take in your hand this mirror. Sit you down and gaze in it until you see a cloud appear."

"And what will come o' that, Mistress Sukey?"

"If the time be lost a-talking, Master Rackham, very little. Will you lose your chance, and wait for next Lammas Eve to try again? Or will you do my bidding and make no question?"

Apparently the latter. For, under direction, the groom is set to gaze fixedly on the little mirror, a convex circle of polished jet, not large enough to cover the palm of his hand. He can see in it the image of his own face, small and fairly clear, and of the room beyond it, with the flickering candle on the table he sits by. He watches them with growing incredulity, as he looks in vain for the promised cloud. At last his patience gives out. "You are making an ass of me, mistress," says he.

"That's a man all over, mother," says Mrs. Trant. And the old woman, after making her say it again, nods her assent, and repeats the words, mocking. "A man all over, daughter." Whereupon the crystal-gazer, ashamed, renews his patience. But no cloud comes; only a stupefaction—not sleep. Something he cannot resist.

Is there a watchfulness as of anticipated triumph in the green eyes that are fixed upon him? Some influence has taken a hold that a few moments since he could have

resisted easily. It is growing, and that triumphant look, is it not growing too? His eyes are closing against his will, but his hand still holds the little mirror, as though he saw.

A moment later the mother nods slightly to the daughter, saying, "Now!" The daughter responds, "I know," as one who, knowing, needs no advice. Presently, in her own time, she rises from her chair, and, crossing over to Mr. Rackham, who seems to be trying to drag his eyes open, lays her left hand upon his head, as though her confidence in its power made the right needless, and says, with a sinister assurance: "Try now and move; you cannot!"

And he cannot. Witch or no witch, aided by familiars or only by her own cunning, Mrs. Trant has got a hold of some sort over this old groom he may be at a loss to shake off.

That night a cock crew loud, but mistakenly, for no dawn had come, under the window of Lucinda's room. It wakened her, to find that Sir Oliver had left her side and was without on the staircase. Was this another sleep-walking? If so, it was more alarming than the last, for his sword was drawn in his hand.

But it was no sleep-walking, for at her sudden exclamation—though "What, Oliver, why?" was all she said—he turned and answered her collectedly. "There be thieves in the house; I heard their noise," said he. "Be silent, and I shall catch them." Then he stole down the stairs, going stealthily as a cat, his silken *roquelaure* gleaming in the moonlight through coloured glass, till he reached the lobby of the great kitchen. Lucinda was close on his heels.

“Thou wert best in bed, Lucy mine,” said he, “except you have a fancy to see a man killed.” This last was more rough speech than was common with him—less of the manner that, as men such as he think, women suppose their due.

“He may be quick afoot, good Oliver,” said she. “But I will see it out, whatever chances. Where was the noise, pray?” To which he answered nothing, only going forward to the kitchen-door. Still, she followed him close.

There was a man in the kitchen, standing still, his face colourless in the moonlight, his eyes fixed, as though sightless. “Stop—stop, Oliver!” cried Lucinda, arresting his sword arm. “Can you not see ’tis John Rackham?”

## CHAPTER XIII

"How can I say, my lady?" said Susan Trant, combing her mistress's hair before the glass, the morning after. "Can I answer for one so strange as Mr. Rackham? All I have to tell is this:—near upon midnight we left him, to come to himself as soon as might be, and find his own way to the stables. I never knew, nor my mother, that he had not returned there."

Her master was still sleeping in the next room, and could scarcely have heard a word. But Lucinda thought it best to drop her voice to say: "Sir Oliver was in a great taking, that the door should be unlocked and unbarred through the night." And, continuing, she enlarged upon the danger to the household from midnight marauders or mere thieves. To this Susan replied that all such were held in terror by the bloodhounds, turned loose at night, which had bred a carelessness both in herself and in her mother about the door-fastening. Still, she acknowledged that Sir Oliver's instructions should have been more strictly followed.

"And yet, what could we do, we two women?" said she. "Even could we have lifted him, we had not the heart to bundle the poor man out to lie on the cold ground, and maybe the rain not keeping off. Just for the drinking of a glass too much of small ale!"

"Only *one* glass, Susan!" Lucinda laughed out at this. But Mrs. Trant became so warm in justification of the groom, so far as his sobriety went; and, so to speak, so overdid her defence of him, that her mistress began to



have suspicions of some mystery in the background. It may have been due to her attendant's manner that she did so, and it is far from certain that this manner was not artificial, and assumed with intention to provoke inquiry, as may be seen from what followed.

For Lucinda, speaking to Sir Oliver of this oddity of Trant's, as she always called her in conversation with him, was met with: "Make the wench talk; she will tell you more. She's a sly soul, but she'll never keep her tongue quiet, in the end." But as he said this he knew Susan's silence was sure on the only subject he cared she should be silent about—namely, her relation with himself. Concerning which it can but be said that its continuance after her marriage had been as much due to his wicked rejoicing at wickedness in secrecy as to any strong fascination the farmer's wife still exercised over him. In any case, he knew that her confidence in her own power was not strong enough to set her a-talking to his present mistress, to provoke her against him.

Lucinda, then, free of apprehension of any serious matter behind what was palpably a screen of concealment, went back that same day to the subject, urging Mrs. Trant to make no further secrets, but to say truly what ailed John Rackham that he should look so white, and that he should—so she described it—push and pinch at his eyelids, as though they had gone stiff. Thereto the orb of the eye itself was fixed, and lacked all expression of thought. This was unlike a drunken man. Had he taken some poisonous drug, that so strange an effect should come about? She was earnest to be told all, and would be Mrs. Susan's surety no harm should come to her of the telling.

Then Mrs. Trant, after some paltering and evasions,

made sudden admission, as one rather relieved by doing so, that she had in effect put a practice on the groom—a thing she had been taught in her youth—but more as a jest than for any profit she could reap of it, there being none. Her success had, she said, alarmed both herself and her mother.

But what—Lucinda then asked, with a roused curiosity—what *was* this practice, learned in youth, that could so confound and overcome the senses of a man of John Rackham's age and stolid, unmoved habit, both of thought and action? Was it not akin to witchcraft, and unlawful?

"Witchcraft, my lady!" Susan exclaimed. "And unlawful!" She was profuse in her disclaimer of necromancy. Was not she the last person, of all in the house, seeing what she had suffered in past years from unjust suspicions, to have any dealings with the Evil One? No—no! No witchcraft for her! "If I were minded," she continued, "to toy and dally with a forbidden craft, should I dare to do so in the house of my good and worshipful master, Sir Oliver, through whose intervention alone I escaped barbarous ill-treatment and cruel persecution seven years since? Should I make no secret of so sinful a practice, even taking my own mother into my confidence?"

"But what is the thing you *have* done?" said Lucinda. "That is what I would know. God a' mercy, woman, if you can make no secret of it to your mother, you need not keep it from me."

"'Tis a trick a child may play, my lady. We knew it as girls—I and my fellows in the village. Some of us had the gift to do it, others were fitter to be practised on."

"But what is it? Do you tell me of it, Susan, that I may know too. Trust me, I shall never betray you. See!—I will swear it, if it please you better."

Now, there lay on a shelf, near by where they talked together, a copy of the Holy Scriptures. For this was in Lucinda's tiring-room, where Sir Oliver came but little. She stretched forth her hand to take up the sacred volume, as though to pledge her oath upon it as a Christian. But Mrs. Trant would have none of this. "Let be, my lady," says she. "This that we talk of is a play of children, not a thing to be sworn upon in God's name." Whereupon Lucinda, thinking to herself, "If this woman touch the holy volume, then is she no witch," held it out to her to replace on the shelf. But she remembered afterwards that Mrs. Trant did not then take it from her, outright and fearlessly; but, making some pretext that her fingers were soiled, and not fit to handle the leather binding, protected it with her apron, so that her hand touched it not.

Then said Lucinda again: "But what sort of thing is this game or practice? I am impatient to know."

"It is thus," replied her attendant: "Whoever can, by persuasion or reward, induce another to keep a fixed gaze for some while on any object—it may be a ring or any jewel—worn on the person, then 'tis said the wearer will have power over such a one as gazes on it, to command him at will."

"And you did this to John Rackham?"

"For a jest, my lady. I promised to show him, as in a gazing crystal . . . your ladyship has heard of such . . . ?"

"Nay—surely! 'Tis a thing well known."

"I promised Mr. Rackham should see therein the face

of the woman that has bewitched his colt Merlin these weeks past. And he taking me at my word, I set him to pry into a piece of black jet I had carried in my bosom all day and night, to be the riper for the purpose."

"And what happened?"

"He saw no witch, I promise you. Nor there is none for him to see. But he did my bidding, clasping his hands, opening and shutting his mouth, just as I said. Then I bade him say your ladyship's maiden name . . ."

"And what said he then?"

"Will you be angry, my lady?"

"Not I!—'tis too silly. What said he?"

"'Mistress Lucinda Mauleverer, of the Old Hall, near to Poynder's Stratton.'" Now, it should be borne in mind that none of Lucinda's communications with her brother had, so far as she knew, reached any other ears than his; except, indeed, it had been the claim she had made to another name than this, which might have reached Dame Hatsell's. Therefore this was clearly a thing said by John Rackham; truly reported, seeing that he alone of all in the house knew what her maiden name had been.

"What more did he say? There was no harm in that."

"I asked him—'twas for the sake of the asking, just that he should talk—no idle curiosity of mine own, my lady . . ."

"Well!—you asked him . . . ?"

"Were your ladyship's parents still living?"

"And he said . . . ?"

"He said your ladyship's mother was dead four years since."

"That was true. Alas that it is so! But he told you my father is living?"

"N-no!" Mrs. Trant shook her head falteringly. "'Dead,' he said. Surely I was right in my hearing . . ."

"He is not dead . . . !"

"Your ladyship would know—that is certain." Then a little creeping doubt nested in Lucinda's mind, saying to her: "How should *we* know, you and I?" Mrs. Trant continued: "Mr. Rackham's speech was not over plain in the saying of it, seeing he clutched his teeth upon his spoken word, and grudged it breath. But I would have sworn it was, 'Dead there and then! He *must* have died.'"

"Oh, but he was talking nonsense! My father is living, and like to live many years." Lucinda's speech fell short of absolute confidence. "Yet listen to me, Susan Trant. Whatever Rackham may say, when you play this trick upon him, the thing is near as strange as though all he said were true. Why should he tell other than truth of a thing he knows quite well?—unless, as may be, he speaks from a dream-world, as men talk in sleep. Sir Oliver is given that way, now and again."

Susan Trant seemed puzzled to word something she would have said. "'Tis not quite as you suppose, my lady . . . well!—'tis thus—how shall I say?" . . .

"It does not matter. The thing is passing strange, and I am curious to see it. . . . But what were you about to say it was like?"

"Your ladyship has seen the prank of boys, who for sport will hold to the ground the beak of some dung-hill cock, and line it with chalk so that the line follows true on the barn floor?"

“Ay—and the poor bird so great a fool he thinks he cannot move, and is stricken fast to the ground by his own mere apprehension. But he makes no sound at bidding.”

“True, my lady! But the trick is of a piece, in its degree.”

“May I not see this practice of yours on John Rackham?”

“Your ladyship will not name it to Sir Oliver?”

“I have no wish nor need to do so. Also, Sir Oliver is something hot and headstrong, and his impatience might break a gap into what would else hold good. He will never believe neither but that Rackham is feigning, and might deal roughly with him. But when may I see thy barn-door fowl chalk-lined?” Lucinda hid whatever she felt of misgiving that this was a forbidden magic, or some shrewd imposture, under a cloak of jesting familiarity with her tirewoman, as though the whole thing were a slight diversion of the moment.

But in the end it was arranged thus:—John Rackham is to come at the bidding of Mrs. Susan, who seems all-powerful with him, to the large disused drawing-room, whence no speech can reach any other part of the house, the lobby being closed at either end by a separate door. So soon as she has, as it were, prepared all things, and acquired a full mastery over him, she must give the word to her mistress, who will await it in this closed passage, whereof she may lock the outer door without causing any suspicion, provided no noise within should reach Sir Oliver’s ears, should he pass that way. That was the arrangement spoken of between Susan and her mistress. But as it proved in the outcome, this door might as well



have been left unlocked—indeed, better, as will be seen later.

Was there a kindling of anticipated triumph in this woman's eyes that afternoon as she stepped out into the paved yard the kitchen looked on, beyond which were the stables, where John Rackham was usually audible hissing at the horse he curry-combed, slapping it on the stomach to suggest a shift of place, drenching it with pails of water and slights, as is the way with grooms? There was an uncanny assurance, at least, about the way she said, as she met him coming from the stable door, swinging the pails he had a mind to refill at the tank below: "I want you, Master Rackham, to come to the ball-room an hour before sundown. Come you in by the kennels, where the window shall be stood open for you. 'Tis my lady's bidding, and mine; see to it that you come."

The groom stood down his pails on either side, and spoke, looking askant. "What if I come not, Mistress Sukey?" said he. His voice was irresolute, for all it snarled.

But there was resolve in hers, though with a kind of mocking sweetness. "Thou *wilt* come," she said. "It lies not with thee to choose, John Rackham." She spoke as to a child, using familiar speech that seemed ill-fitted to the grizzled man she addressed.

He growled his resentment at this assumption of power, whether it was to attract or command. "If I was a bit younger, mistress," said he, "I'd know which to choose. Or if ye were a bit younger yourself . . . well!—I wouldn't be the first." He meant to be offensive, but it was a coarse and unskilful effort, and told for nothing. Mrs. Trant remained unmoved. She replied with equable good-humour:

"You will be in the South Court, Master Rackham, to feed the bloodhounds, where the ballroom window opens. You will desire to be gone, but you will cry **back** on your desire, and stay. You will then come by the ballroom window, as I have told you. Nor you shall not know why you come. And yet, come you must! The choice will not be yours."

"Stand clear, mistress," said John Rackham. "Have I the time to waste, palavering with the likes of thee?" And he swung away from her with his pails, going to the water-tank below, but muttering uneasily to himself.

The wind was blowing off the sea that evening towards sundown, bringing white mist and gusts of fine rain. It was that sort of light drift that keeps no man within doors, and Sir Oliver would have had Lucinda ride with him in spite of it. She, however, remained, partly because the young horse, her only mount now, was restive again, which the groom would have it was caused by his enemy the witch, that had ridden the colt in the night-time. There were the witch-marks on him, plain to see! His own horse had cast a shoe, and was to be led to the farrier's in the morning. So Sir Oliver rode alone.

Mr. Rackham, in the South Court on which the ballroom windows opened, wondered what had come to the dogs. Were they bewitched, too? Old Diego—or Spot, as he was now called, from the white spot on his forehead—would not come to his hand, but shrank and shivered back into his kennel. Zo, the old black-backed bitch, mother of the many pups Sir Oliver had sold to his friends, was even more intractable, snapping at his hand as it reached her collar. This was unwonted, for the bloodhound is a sweet and docile dog—whatever folk

may imagine from the terror of his name—and nowise like the fierce white Maremma dog, nor the untrustworthy breed of St. Bernard, however sagacious this last may be in the service of man.

But even bewitched dogs are content to be fed and cared for, and in time this was done; and now it comes to be seen whether Mr. Rackham will go back to the stable; or, obedient to the injunction he has received, enter the house by the window to seek Mrs. Trant in the ballroom. He seems to have no doubt on the matter, turning away to go, yet showing himself aware that some influence is upon him by muttering: “We shall see who is to be master, Mistress Sukey!” And yet, no sooner has he, as it were, convinced himself that his will is free to choose if he shall go or stay, than he turns back with an oath under his breath, yet hesitating now and again on his way to the window, and at last—it may be surmised—convinced that he is acting of his own choice, lays his hand upon it, and, pushing at it, finds it open; for it opens inwards, reaching to the floor.

So far, there may have been nothing of necromancy in this. Nothing, that is, of any necromancy but the world-old, familiar enchantment every woman with the hall-mark of Mother Venus on her can practise at will on any man turned out of Nature’s mint—ay!—even though he be nearer his grave than this grizzled old servitor; this most unpromising mark, one would say, for the poisoned arrows of her baby-son. But then this story has only Mrs. Susan’s word to go by for what took place in the kitchen not twenty-four hours since. For, to gain an end she had in view, it may have suited her to make light of her own knowledge, while really tampering with the black art; so that Lucinda should feel

no alarm, and not shrink away from the hearing of what it suited her attendant she should know. The story, as it chanced, is ignorant of what passed before the woman left the subject of these practices of hers alone in the kitchen, to recover from the effects of them as best he might.

Whatever was the nature of the influence that brought old John to put his neck again in the noose that it was easy for him, to all appearance, to have escaped, it was the work of Susan Trant, who awaited him in the great empty ballroom—empty, that is, of all but mirrors, pictures, and furniture packed in sacking. He did not see her at first, and, indeed, was breathing the freer to think she had not kept her appointment, when her laugh came to him from behind, and, turning, he saw her standing in the window-jamb he had but just passed. Later, he put this down to some sudden witchcraft of hers, doubting that his lack of observation on entering could have deceived him.

She, for her part, laughed an under-laugh, not pleasant to hear. “Why do you come for my bidding so freely, good John?” said she. “See now!—there is the window. Thou art thine own master. Why not go?” She leaned, saying this, against the shutter, now folded in its place. “Is the space too narrow to pass? See!—I will stand back.” She kept her arms akimbo, facing him in the shadow of the wall, but with all her comeliness at its best.

The groom looked and spoke sullenly. “What do you want of me, mistress?” said he. But he made no move to go.

“What should I want, Master Rackham, but to do a good turn to a graceless loon, that knows not his own

advantage? Sit you down here, facing the light—unless you have a wish to be gone. . . . See!—the way is open. . . . Wilt thou not go? . . . No?—well, then, take this in your hand again, as last night, and keep to looking constantly therein, till I say ‘Stop!’”

She placed the jet circle in his hand again, as last night. “Shall I see the face of the witch-wife?” said he.

“Very like!” was her reply. She withdrew slowly back to a dark corner of the great room, leaving him under the light of the centre window seated on the covering of a packed *fauteuil*, or sofa, with his eyes fixed on the little black mirror.

“Surely he is asleep, Susan.”

“Not asleep, my lady!”

“Then . . . what? He breathes heavily, and hears not what we say. And see—his eyes are closed. Wake him! I do not like this practice.”

“There is nothing to fear, my lady. I have seen many another thus. Think you I would compass any ill? What grudge have I against Mr. Rackham? Now mark what I do, and you shall see this is no common sleep.” So far Lucinda and her tirewoman spoke together, the one having come at the other’s summons from the lobby without. Then the latter, going closer to the sofa, lays her hand over the groom’s head, pressing her thumb between his eyes. “Thou canst not open thine eyes,” says she, with a strange assurance.

Then to Lucinda’s wonder, and somewhat fear, the man, who seems now to hear plainly, begins to strain at his eyes, so to speak, to get them to open, but fails to do more than show the whites, as though the orb of the eye itself had vanished upwards.

"Oh, Susan!" cries Lucinda, in alarm. "Undo him. I beg of you! This is unholy." Then she herself, overcoming a reluctance to touch him, seizes the lappet of his coat, shaking him, and saying: "Wake up, John Rackham, wake up! Think if Sir Oliver should come!"

But there stands Mrs. Trant, her green eyes most satisfied, and watches on, with a still assurance. "He will not speak, my lady, except I give him leave," says she.

"Then give him leave, in God's name," cries Lucinda, "and let him come to himself!" Her alarm is growing stronger as the thing gets stranger.

"Will you have an end, my lady, and never know the meaning of his tale of last night? But I will make him speak for himself, touching that. Listen to me, Master Rackham, and answer me truly. Now—hast thou found thy voice?" He muttered something, and Mrs. Trant repeated, as one who interprets: "What would her ladyship have you say? Why—hearken now to what she will tell you of her father, and unsay your tale of last night."

"Ay—what could possess you, Mr. Rackham, to make up such a story? My father is alive and well." But Lucinda did not feel the confidence she affected.

The groom seemed to struggle against his own speech. "I am not minded to tell all I know. That tale should come from the master."

"Oh, Susan, what is that he says? His voice chokes in his throat, and his words are lost."

"Repeat that again, for my lady's hearing. Find thy voice, man!" Thus Mrs. Trant, in whom a sly, malicious expectation accords well with something of the seeming of a handsome cat.



Rackham, his eyes always closed, blurts out, as unwilling speech: "I said—that tale should come from the master. How can the blame be mine? Let him answer it!"

Then Lucinda, with a terror of she knows not what newly come upon her, beseeches the groom to make no further secret of the thing he means. Has something she should know been kept from her? "Speak out, John Rackham, speak out!"—she cries.—"Oh, what can all this mean?" And thereat she sinks down on a couch near by, white and trembling, yet with strength rather to hear and know than to be tortured with doubts.

Then Mrs. Trant, keeping her hand still on the groom's grizzled head, says imperatively: "You hear what says my lady? Make no more ado, but tell her thy tale of the duel, and her father's death." Thus she showed that she had never yet told all of what had passed the night before.

But when Lucinda, giving a great cry at the words, "her father's death," staggered to her feet, and then fell back, white and dumb, Susan made as though to communicate to her by signs, as between themselves, that all this was but a fantastic dream, a delusion. Then Lucinda, interpreting aright her gestures of brow and mouth, got calmness to listen, sickened though she was with the bare mention of a thing so terrible.

Rackham then, speaking as though the words were dragged from him by some force, tells again the tale it seems he had already told—at least, in part. It is the tale told early in this story, as seen by one of its actors. As he proceeds, so impossible does the whole thing seem to Lucinda that she can respond to Mrs. Trant's slight signs, hinting at his complete delusion, with a half-nod of

sincere assent. It is hallucination all through, clearly! But grotesque as it is—for, otherwise, would not Oliver be a liar?—she cannot but shudder at the outburst of a brutal earnestness over the last thrust, as the groom casts aside the mask of his wicked heart to tell it.

And with that he ended, saying, in response to a word of Mrs. Trant's: "What more, mistress? A ride home with a light heart, to think which way the luck had gone! And my gentleman would have a pail of water to wash clean the blood, lest his lady should know aught of his work afore breakfast, and was off from the stable-yard through the garden."

But upon this Lucinda caught him up short, as for an error in fact. For how, said she, could Sir Oliver pass from the stable-yard to the garden, seeing there was no door? Then says Rackham: "Ay, my lady, no door to pass in and out, but one Master Oliver would have me open for the nonce that stood ever locked, and had done for years, so he should not pass through the house to be seen of the household." But though she noted this, and recalled it later, her uppermost thought at the moment was mixed with a memory of how she tended that scratch on Oliver's brow one morning—when was it? Surely the very day he was seized with that first convulsion! But oh—she could remember!—that was the parrot, Chow, and the parrot's house was a far step from the stable-yard. How fanciful she got at the least thing!

Then at her bidding, seeing that Rackham had told his story—and who could say his reason might not suffer if this went on?—Mrs. Trant, affecting or truly possessing a complete power over his will, went through sundry legerdemain performances, as waving of her hands over

his forehead or blowing on it. But it seemed also to Lucinda that in the doing of this she sang some catch-rhyme, such as children use for diversion. She did not, however, conceive this to be of the essence of the business, but only an idle fancy. Anyway, in the end Rackham opened his eyes of a sudden, and a more bewildered man would be hard to find. He caught his head in his hands, feeling about and round it, rubbed his eyes, and gazed upon his palms, seeming unsure if he were awake or dreaming. Then he said in a daft way, turning about and gazing blankly at the air: "Where is he?"

"Where is who, thou puzzle-pate?" said Mrs. Trant. "There is none here but my lady and myself, nor has been this hour gone by. Ay—look in all the cupboards if you will!" For he was searching about with his eyes in all corners.

"Let be, Susan!" said Lucinda. "Whom do you seek so keenly? What is he like?" She spoke as one who humours a jest.

"There was one here but now," answered the groom doggedly. "One of them. Mighty small, but bad to have ado with! I would pay him, though."

"You have seen, my lady, there has been none here." So speaking, Susan's look said: "Mark his humours and fantasies!" But he caught her meaning.

"I tell thee there has been more than one here. Speak truth, Susan Trant."

"Her ladyship has seen, John Rackham." She waited as one content to wait, with a smile at the folly of it. "You will be sorry for such speech when your wits come again, Master Rackham," said she.

"I tell thee," he replied angrily, "there has been more than one here. Else had they never made me tell out

all this tale. A plague upon 'em, and upon you, too, Mistress Sukey!"

"But the tale was all a false one!" cried Lucinda. "Was it not? . . . Oh, say it was false!" Then the groom's face got a stupid grin on it, as he answered: "Never a word of truth in it, mistress! 'Twas put upon me to say, and I said it." For his senses had come back to him thus far, that he could see how welcome his disclaimer would be of the truth of his own story. But not to show him yet awhile how inexplicable had been his telling of it.

Now it chanced that Sir Oliver, turning back impatient of the rain-drift that strengthened ever from the seaward, and finding no groom to receive him in the stable-yard as accustomed, came at this moment within the house, exclaiming against his servant for his absence from his post of duty. First to the kitchen, where he finds none but the old mother, Dame Hatsell; by which he is none the wiser, for she either cannot or will not say she knows aught either of Rackham, or her daughter, or her lady. Whereupon Sir Oliver swings away through the house with an oath, and, as luck will have it, his eye lights on the one thing he was not to see, the vacant keyhole of the ballroom door. Surely stray devil's imps prompt these things sometimes! Seeing the door keyless, he must needs infer that someone is within, or has been. For why otherwise should it have been disturbed? To know more, he shakes the door and rattles at the handle, shouting. Then he is sure of a voice on the farther side. For the two women within speak together, disconcerted at his return. So he rattles again, angrily.

Lucinda will explain all, she says, and takes her key,

to open the door. For she thinks of the whole thing as a mere jape, and that Oliver will laugh at the telling of it. But to her surprise, Susan Trant was greatly concerned that Sir Oliver should not be told, begging her to keep silence. "But if he ask me how we came here, good Susan," said Lucinda, "tell me—what shall I say then?"

However, it ended thus, for the time:—Rackham, still bewildered, was packed off through the window, and some lame excuse concocted which was made to serve, of how Lucinda had wished to try the old spinet, or what not. But she said to her lover, below her breath: "I shall tell thee all about it presently, sweet Oliver. 'Twas a little jest of ours." Thereupon he, going back to the stable-yard, relieved his ill-temper by laying his whip about the shoulders of John Rackham, with at least one good effect, that the groom recovered his senses all the quicker, though he became very hazy about what had really happened—more so than at first.

It was about this time that Vincent, turning round on a bed where he had lain through many days of delirium, said to the man who sat beside him, watching out the small hours of the morning: "Roger, take my hand and tell me who slew him. I can bear to hear it now."

Then Roger Locke, convinced of his strength by his voice, answered without a qualm: "He was slain by Raydon of the New Hall, whom I would have made to answer for his misdeed, but that the hand of God was upon him, and our Lucy was betwixt us." And then he told him the whole tale, according to his knowledge of it, and the two spoke together in the silence of the night, and what they spoke of was retribution for a murder; and the place they spoke in was the sleeping chamber

of its victim. That was the bed on which his corpse was laid two months since, where his son lies now, wasted with fever that followed the shock of the news he had to hear.

So they talked until, as the slow dawn began to creep in, each had come to know all the other knew. Then Vincent said aloud: "Honour is gone, but Lucy is still there; and whatever you may think, Roger, she loves her father as of old. I know both by word and manner, and look. You thought her heart was changed. But no—no!—not Lucy's! Heaven hasten the hour that may change it towards her miscreant that we may not call to his account, for she loves him! It will come, and then . . ." His speech grew faint from exhaustion. And it was so with him for many days; but his strength came back in the end, as we shall see.

It would profit nothing to tell at length how he had ridden nearly to his home, all joyous expectation of the meeting to come, when, stopping at the recognition of an old neighbour, he was met by his commiseration for a great loss; and, being told the tale, fell like a stone insensible, never hearing the name of the man who had slain his father. And then, being borne to the Old Hall unconscious, remained in half or entire delirium, with snatches of reason, for many days and nights. Moreover, it is easy for the reader to image all he needs of the events, with no help but the bare facts now told.



## CHAPTER XIV

LUCINDA cast about in her heart how she should tell Sir Oliver of this strange freak of Mrs. Trant's, and her mysterious subordination of the groom. But it was a strange tale to tell, and how would Sir Oliver take it? How could the unhappy subject of what looked very like necromancy be preserved from the anger of the man of whom he had, however unconsciously, told so preposterous a lie? She herself felt much more pity than blame for John Rackham; but how could she rely upon it that indignation against the curious result of Mrs. Trant's manipulations might not get the better, in her lover, of amusement at its absurdity?

But of one thing she felt very sure, that the better humour she could get his lordship in with herself, the easier would it be to talk to him about this fantastical business, without fear of his taking what she supposed to be the merest dream-chatter otherwise than as a jest. So that evening she was at great pains to be at her loveliest, that she might cajole him and hold him, as it were, under a spell, to listen to her story without impatience at the part he himself was made to play in it.

She was wisely at odds with the women of her time, who, after a few years of liberation from the preposterous farthingales and cramped coiffures of their predecessors, seemed like to go back to them, it may be from the example of the late-married queen and her ladies of Portugal.

The loose flowing gown and hair held simply by a string of pearls, celebrated in the songs of poets of the time, and shown in the paintings of its artists, made up, with a touch of informality all her own, the wardrobe of Lucinda. But even in the simplest outward seeming of a woman's dress there is much to choose in the manner of it; as few notes may make music, or jar upon the hearer, according to his skill who arranges them.

So that whoever reads this may take it as honest truth that Lucinda, who would have looked surpassingly beautiful even though her robe had been plain grogram, like that of Dame Hatsell, lost nothing by the simple rich clinging of its silk brocade about her form—pliable to a miracle—glittering with a hundred mysterious sheens. Nor by the rope of pearls Mrs. Trant had disposed so cunningly, a snake acreep in a thicket of sweet hair, black as the jet of her own magic mirror.

Sir Oliver was gracious enough, passing his mistress as it were in review; admitting, but critically, her beauty. That was his natural tone, and the one Lucinda best loved in him. His artificial one, of effusive compliment, was in abeyance this evening, and this made her all the happier. "Thou hast thy pearls on to-night, sweet Lucy, I see," said he. And she answered: "Ay—the pearls," and kissed him. "And the ring with brilliants?" said he. "Why, surely!—surely!" said she, and made believe to strike his face with her flat hand, then kissed him again. For this ring was one she always wore.

Susan Trant's eye was on this, and had no good-will in it for either of the two. She went away to the kitchen, and there her mother, in a fit of hearing, caught her mocking Lucinda's speech, and thinking it truly her voice—for, indeed, it was a clever fetch—would have it

that her ladyship had spoken. But it was her daughter, mocking her speech: "Surely—Oliver—surely!"

"Shall I sing thee all the ballad again, sweet Oliver, of the man behind the wainscot, and how he slew the father of his ladylove?" So said Lucinda, after supper, at the spinet.

"I do not like the tune of it. Sing to me rather, sweet Lucy, of thy starry eyes, thy lips that seem on roses fed." So said Oliver, in all the enjoyment of his Virginian tobacco. He spoke of a song whose author's name is now lost, but he could have told it then, perhaps; though even then it was an old song.

This song Lucinda sang. But as she sang, a thought crossed her mind. Had it not been heartless in her, when she spoke so freely of the ballad that Oliver—it seemed—had no fancy for, to miss remembering that it was just upon her first singing of it that he had fallen stricken in that terrible convulsion? What wonder that he should hate the tune of it? Never mind!—she would make it up to him. She went when the song was done, and sat beside him as he lay on a couch he favoured for laziness after meals. She lapped him in the sweetness of her young life, caressed his wicked head with her sweet, guiltless hands, called him, the darkness of whose heart outwent all evil she had knowledge of, her treasure and delight. And he, for his part, while he took her tribute as his due, felt anew that old uneasiness lest the tale of her father's death should reach her before he had eaten his fill of this feast, and wearied of it. For how could he be deaf to the voice of his under-thought, that said to him, hour by hour: "Search the foul records of your life in vain for a girl like this——"? It had come upon

him slowly—the thing called Love. It is a thing he and his like know naught of;—a thing they can never know but by a chance. But none take licence more freely than they to use the sacred word—the word whose very utterance by them is blasphemy.

Had it not been for this abnormal growth in the desert of his soul, how should he have cared to prolong his retirement from the glare and dazzle of the world of town—all the delights of the dicebox and the card-table—of a drama congenial to impious wit and debauched sense—of the delirious worship of a bedaubed Venus, a goddess of paint and patches? Why should he, predominant among Wits, self-styled, a man of note for his profligacy in the world of profligates—why should he make surrender of himself to solitude in this monotonous, outlandish exile? The reason had never been plainer to him than this evening, as he felt—or at least made his first acknowledgment of feeling—the full extent of Lucinda's power over him. She had crept unawares into the heart of his being, and wrapped him round with the enchantment some never know but in the creatures of a dream. And yet, so apt was he in the knowledge of his own wickedness, that he could still forecast the day when he would fling aside as worthless the thing he had possessed; would let the dish he had enjoyed the best of be removed, for whoso would to finish. But this was only the voice of his experience. The banquet had not palled, as yet. Certainly not yet, this evening when he could lie there, puffing his tobacco, closing his eye to rejoice in the sweetness of her hands at their best, as they caressed the locks of hair they were so proud of. For in this solitude, afar from Courts and modish devices, men's periwigs were cast aside; and Oliver, moved by his mistress's wish, had left

his head to its natural covering, and Lucinda watched each new growth of it daily.

"Thou wilt never need to wear a wig, vain Oliver," said she, "with such a crop as this." And her laugh rang through the empty house, and reached even to Susan Trant in her kitchen.

"She has not told her tale yet, mother," said Susan, working silently on her pillow-lace. Dame Hatsell answered: "What is that to thee, daughter? She will tell it him in the night, when none hears." And Susan replied: "He never wakes to talk, in the night." But her look was that of the assassin who thinks in peace of the dagger he knows he can use to-morrow; or of one who watches for the action of a poison he has used before.

But in the room above Lucinda is making much, with caress and jest, of the handsome head that lies, nothing loth, upon her bosom. And there the idle chatter goes on thus:

"The less need to carry a pocket-glass, my Lucy!"

"How a pocket-glass?"

"Every spruce coxcomb nowadays has his pocket-mirror, to comb his artificial locks out. Thou shalt see them combing them out in the playhouse; for 'tis the fashion nowadays to do so."

"Shall I go to the playhouse then, when we go to London?"

"Sure enough—in a little black mask. That is how a lady goes to such like places, if she be of repute."

"Am I of repute, Oliver mine? Truly, I would soonest keep away from places where I may not show my face like an honest woman."

"'Tis for the sake of the men, my Lucy. But I pity

the youth that sees thine eyes for the first time through a mask. 'Tis an added sting, to my thought."

"A saucy boy! Let him mind his business and take note of the players."

"What—my mistress!—all in a taking about a young Corydon that may never see thee. Or, if he do, he may be more in a mind for Daphne, or for Phyllis. . . ."

"Now fie upon thee for shame, Oliver! To promise me a young beau for a lover, and then to jilt me thus! But I'll none of him. His Daphne and his Phyllis may fight for which shall have him—and either may, for aught I care. 'Corydon,' indeed!" Now, as Lucinda said this she sat encircling her lover's head, as it lay on her lap, with her white hands and arms, or making as though she would adjust some defect of his face at her pleasure. For she was, as her brother had said, besotted about this man, and all her joy was in his presence. And he, for his part, took her worship of him as his due; although, as we have seen, his vanity and selfhood rose in revolt against the growth of her sweet power, even while he could not but luxuriate in its light and warmth.

Then says Lucinda to him: "What makes thee cry out upon my song of Lady Joan and Lord Ferrers of the Dyke, Oliver Hard-to-please?" For so happy was she in this unguarded laughter-moment, that she must needs again forget the ill-flavour this song's name would have for Oliver. And thereto she sang the quaint short phrase with a twist in it, that is the life of the strange little air.

"There lies the reason of it!" says Sir Oliver. "'Tis that very same flimsy lilt, a bit of musical jargon at the best, that gets upon the drum o' the ear and won't begone. Why!—whom do you think I heard a-singing of it, that



never sang a song in his life before that I ever heard tell of? Now guess."

Lucinda thought and thought, but could not guess for want of men about the house to father the tale on. Then she tried the fisherfolk. "Not Reuben nor Ben Thurkill?" said she. "They have never been near enough to hear me sing. Besides, they will sing themselves over their net-mending by the hour."

"Think again, Lucy mine! Think well round the house, upstairs and down. . . . Ho, ho!—hast thou got him at last?" For Lucinda's gaze of perplexity at Sir Oliver's face, with a chuckle to come in it, ends in a sudden irresistible laugh.

"Not John Rackham, Oliver! Never John Rackham!" 'All her speech is broken with her laughter at the notion of the groom singing. "Why—how came you to know what tune he meant to sing?"

"By the words, fairest Lucy—by the words. Else might I have been at a loss to be sure of the tune. Indeed, as I judge, he would sing but one tune in any case, and that mostly one note and no more. But for the words, he is bound by the book, and I can tell thee this, wench—'twas thy song and no other, concerning of the girl that hid her lover in a basket. . . ."

"Out upon thee, Oliver! 'Twas not in a basket, but behind the wainscot, with room for all his limbs, only his sword was hard to pack in. . . ." But then Lucinda stopped a few moments, and when she spoke next, thought was in her voice. "But did John Rackham know all that song?—even to the drawn swords and the blood?"

"I know not of the drawn swords and the blood, but he knew many a verse." Then Sir Oliver, ill at ease,

made a show of remembering suddenly a thing his memory had not really let slip. "Ay, to be sure, I have it now—the two of them came to question. Two lovers of one maid, were they not?"

"No, no!—it was her father, inattentive man! No lover at all! . . ." But Lucinda was in a maze of pre-occupation by some new thought, and said no more, sitting still with her lover's head in keeping in her lap—for he had put aside a finished pipe—and turning round in her mind the thing that had arrested her. Then quite of a sudden she outs with: "I care not, Oliver mine—I will tell thee, and be thought a fool for my pains at the worst!"

"Highty-tighty, wench!—what's all the to-do? Why such a long face? Has Master Rackham—ho, ho!—been making love to thee?" Now, this seemed to amuse Sir Oliver mightily.

"Have your laugh out, silly Oliver!—thou art just no better than a boy. But when you have done, I will tell my story, and you may call me fool outright."

Now the thought that had crossed Lucinda's mind, making her at her ease about her tale of Mrs. Trant's tricks on John Rackham, and resolving her on the telling of it forthwith, was just this:—that sure enough she now knew what was the source and origin of all this crazy dream of the bewitched man. What could be more certain? His disordered brain had fitted all the ballad's intent and action to the persons nearest about him. Any two lovers would have served his turn, but she and Sir Oliver were readiest to hand. And see how a hundred things, all within Rackham's knowledge, lent themselves to the fostering of his craze. Foremost of all, her father's swordsmanship—why, he was, as her brother had said,

famous for it! And, for all that a vulgar mind such as Rackham's could know, what was there in her relations with Oliver so unlike those of the lawless couple in the ballad? What could *he* know of the solemn pledges that had clothed her compliance with her lover's petitions with all the sacramental character of the altar itself? Alas, for poor Lucinda!—she little knew how freely pledges come from men who know that Law will support, and Society excuse, the breach of covenants made in disregard of their accepted formulas.

But this does not concern us now, though it passed through Lucinda's thought as she pictured for the moment Rackham's version of her love and Oliver's. Of course, such a version would fit the ballad. His waking dream was as natural as any sleeping dream would have been. She might have dreamed such a one herself, and waked in terror.

So, as she sat there nursing Sir Oliver's handsome head—for none could gainsay his outward beauty—and making believe to retouch and improve it as a sculptor might, she had no thought of backing out of the telling of her tale, but only a doubt of how she should accommodate its strangeness to the understanding of her hearer. And as for him, he was, to say the truth, but little concerned to know this tale of hers as he lay enjoying the sweet touch of her hands about his wicked head, letting her sweet voice soak into his false heart—more and more overpowered; in short, by this strange witchery of a till-then-unknown phase or version of Love. Language halts and goes lame in the telling of it, but it was with him as though some Oread, the captive of a wandering Satyr of the woods, had decoyed her captor into a Temple of the God Himself, and held to his lips a nectar cup, that he

might pour a libation at an unaccustomed shrine. And yet, to meet her fancy, rather than from any curiosity of his own, he would not leave her without encouragement.

"What's thy story, Lucy mine? I will not call thee a fool for nothing, trust me! Tell it out roundly!" Oh, had he but known what it would be—he, lapped in all his false security—more and more intoxicated with his new-found nectar!

"It would serve thee but right if I told thee nothing, Oliver mine," says she. But he is forgiven, for she bends over the handsome wicked face with a long kiss, then goes on: "But listen! 'Tis a tale of witchcraft, and Trant is at the bottom of it."

"Oho!—is that it? What devil is in it, this time? Apollyon—or Ashtarothe?" Sir Oliver is scoffing, but his attention is roused, for all that.

"Nay, I know not. Maybe both! She has bewitched John Rackham, and now she can make him do her will. . . . Oh, but you would laugh to see the power she can put upon him to make him close his eyes, and the much ado he has to open them. Nay—he cannot, try how he may!"

"A pitiful small triumph for the black art of a witch in league with the Devil! If she could force John Rackham to open his mouth now! . . . there would be a thing to raise the Devil for. But—just to close his eyes!" And Oliver laughed out, and would turn it all to a jest.

But Lucinda had no mind to be thwarted of her tale, and clapped her hand on his mouth to bring him to silence, also bidding him be serious, for that it was a thing she, for one, could make neither head nor tail of. Thereupon he kissed the palm of her hand within, but said, though

with less of derision: "They are making a fool of thee, silly Lucy. 'Tis a plot of conspiracy, and a mighty easy one for any pair of knaves. Take my word for it, Master Rackham will open his eyes fast enough if he hears my voice. I wager the Devil's imps won't wait for my coming. No, no!"

"I doubt if either the Devil or his imps have any hand in the matter," said Lucinda, but seriously. "May not this thing and its like be some mere freak and folly of Nature, that chances once, and there an end?"

Sir Oliver's air was that of one who weighs for its worth the thought of a lesser mind, and can concede it some applause. "A shrewd guess, for a wench," said he. "There be cases of a like sort. Get on with thy tale, sweet Lucy." And then he made as though he would bite off with his teeth her little finger-tip, and she, for her part, was all indulgent of his smallest whim. But she was clear now in her intent to tell this affair of Trant and John Rackham, thinking it plain enough that all this preposterous dream of the groom's was a mere fetch, and as foundationless as he himself said it was.

"What will you say of it all, I wonder now, wise Oliver?"

"I can say nothing till thou hast told thy tale, Mistress Slowspeech."

"Why—you saw Rackham but last night. . . ."

"What of last night? The knave was drunk, my Lucy! Why—he will swill ale by the hogshead, as lief as not."

"There was no ale in this case, Oliver."

"Mighty little witchcraft, simple Lucy!"

"Must I hold thy mouth shut, to keep thee quiet? Now listen. When I charged Trant this morning to tell

me honest truth of what she knew, she would have it Rackham was no dronkelew, no more than reason, as all men are. But last night least of all, seeing she had persuaded him that if he would forswear food and drink but for one day, it being Lammas-tide. . . .”

“Lammas Day is a feast, and no fast. . . .”

“Keep thy mouth shut, silly! The more the feast, the more the merit of him who fasts. ’Tis easy to fast when all fast alike. Dost thou not see that this was all a practice of Trant’s, to make a great seeming of a simple trick she was minded to play on Rackham, just to pay him out for his dogged silence about . . . about things he could tell if he chose. . . . Keep thy mouth shut, silly Oliver, and listen!—’twas no harm, what she sought to know—only my father’s name and mine. . . .”

For Sir Oliver had begun to ask who had given Mrs. Trant leave to pry into what concerned her not—a by-word in reproof of Mrs. Trant, and no more. He went on: “But the trick—the simple trick—what of it?”

“I only tell thee, love, what she told me.” So said Lucinda, and then went on to report what the tale already knows concerning the spell cast upon Rackham, and the seeming simple means used for its attainment. Sir Oliver honoured her narration now and again with a grunt of incredulity, and would have spoken once or oftener, but Lucinda each time clapt her hand on his mouth, and bade him be silent till she should finish.

Now the part she least relished the telling of—although, indeed, she really thought it no more than a mad dream—was the substance of Rackham’s narrative of the duel, and the return home. So what between her slurring of it over, and Sir Oliver’s growing itch to pooh-pooh the whole thing, the tale hung fire, or was lost in her dis-



claimers of any sense or coherency in the ramblings of the bewitched man when most completely under the strange influence. For what she herself was seeking to tell Oliver was the story of Mrs. Trant's curious power over Rackham, and the strange practice by which she had attained it, rather than the fantastic delusion it had produced in its subject or victim. So she laid a great over-stress upon the incoherency of his story, that an exaggeration of it might frank her of the telling of a tale she would have felt shame to repeat. After all, the gist of the matter was, not the rubbish talked by the person thus oddly affected, but the strange way in which his affection came about.

Oliver, for his part, though he had not been without misgiving that Rackham might break loose one day in some Bacchanalian moment, conceived that this time, witchcraft or no, he had kept all his wits and his counsel, and held his tongue on all matters in which an indiscretion would not only have lost him his situation, but procured him a sound horse-whipping into the bargain. For surely, had Lucinda heard aught of the story of the duel, it would have been her first thing to speak of, not all this rhodomontade of silly necromancies. So he felt little misgiving in seeking to know somewhat of the disjointed words she said had come from Rackham in his dream—too disjointed and ill-articulate for her to make sense of it, so she said, on any terms.

“And what more had my drunken knave to tell, beyond thine own maiden name, my Lucy?”

But Lucinda was backward to answer, for the sound of his speech jarred on her heart. “’Tis my name still, of right, sweetheart,” said she. “Until my dear lord’s is mine of right,” she added.

“My heart is thine, love,” said he. “And what would you more?” And his voice rang so true, for once, that tears of joy were in Lucinda’s eyes at the hearing of it. She fairly buried his face in the kisses she gave him—closed his wicked eyes with, stilled his wicked lips. Wicked despite of all, for he was but an outside stranger, a lawless trespasser, in the Temple of Love, the real God who has but one name. Yet so intoxicated was he, as it were, with the incense fumes at the altar, that a thought took form in his mind on Lucinda’s behalf. “I would,” said he, “that my Lady, whom the Devil fly away with, were not so damnably virtuous. If only she had it in her to tickle the fancy of our sweet King Charles! The chance of a coronet carries the outworks of virtue. But she is scraggy, at best, and her lips are tight on her teeth. So ’tis hopeless!”

“Now let the poor lady be!” said Lucinda, and the music of her laughter rang through the house, and reached Susan Trant, on the watch in the kitchen. “You married her yourself, silly Oliver—you married her yourself! Now talk of John Rackham and his plight. What can you make of it, at the best?”

“Faith—nothing! ’Tis as you said but now, a freak of Nature.”

Then Susan Trant, in the kitchen, hearing the laughter, says to her mother: “She has not told him. She will not tell him to-night.” So she rises from her lace-work, and her mother does the like from her needlework, for the hour is very late. But a little time passes while each collects wandering reels, rewinds disordered skeins, and makes all safe for the night. Then both together are on their way to the garret in the roof, where they sleep. No

other servant slept in the house at this time; nor at any time in this part of it, when service from without was insufficient for the household.

The rain-drift that has lasted on, with scarcely a lull, through the whole day, is breaking into loose cloud-rack, scouring across a new blue heaven, queened by a great full-moon. The vapour-veils are swift to come and go, and the silver light comes and vanishes apace through the high window on the stair as the two pass up it, saying never a word, and only one of them hearing the voices still continuing beyond the door they will pass directly, there on the first landing just above. Dame Hatsell, who hears nothing—she has been this evening deafer than ever—passes on unheeding. Her daughter remains listening, still as a motionless snake. One hand holds the blown-out taper the moon makes needless, the fingers of the other are on her mouth, as though her silence were somehow insecure in her own keeping. She can only hear chance words—something of a dream of his mother—nothing she can piece up to coherency. Her eyes have a cruel gleam in the moonlight, as of joyous anticipation of ill-hap befalling someone else.

Has she caught some change in the manner of the speakers, that listening should quicken her expectancy of something just at hand—be fraught with more impatience? Yes! Voices raised—interchange of speech abrupt and sudden; then again a hushing of the voices, as in greater concord. Then a kind of laugh from the man, not over gleeful, followed by continued speech of the woman; a sudden interruption, and a cry. Then the voices of both, broken, spasmodic, beseeching; and in the end the man's voice alone in the silence, speaking earnestly.

How long will he speak thus? A little more—a little more—and then the woman's voice, but strained and unearthly, followed by a cry and a long silence. And then, without forewarning or seeming cause, a sudden piercing shriek, the woman's voice again, and his. But this time Susan Trant can catch a word she says. She says it again and again. What is it? "Murderer!"

At that word the listener at the door laughed a laugh that scarcely gave a sound; then, waiting to hear no more, passed on light-footed to the upper stair-flight and got away.

On the landing old Mrs. Hatsell met her daughter. "Who called?" said she. A headshake in reply meant, "None called"; a warning finger was a caution of silence. Then Mrs. Trant drew her mother with her to their bedroom, full of the white moonlight, and, closing the door, spoke loud in her ear. "She has told him," cried she. And her voice had all the glee of her heart in it.

The old woman's hearing was capricious. For a sound below, much like the fall of some heavy body, causing breakage of glass or chinaware, was plain to her, although a scream the fisherfolk might have heard a mile away had seemed no more than a mere summons. She spoke to her daughter, saying, "That is the master's fall, in one of his takings."

But Susan Trant laughed a cool, ugly laugh beneath her breath, saying in an undertone, "What if it were?" But to her mother she said aloud, "'Tis no such thing! 'Tis the hound Zorra that bays the moon." And the old dame believed her, for she had learned by long experience how her hearing might cheat her, and would often take her daughter's word against her own judgment.

Go back now to Lucy and Oliver, and mark what came to pass since the story's last word about them.

“ ‘A freak of Nature,’ ” said Lucinda, echoing Oliver's speech. “Ay, truly!—but a freak that uses little scraps of sound sense to the end of madness, a touch here and a touch there—all else in confusion! But, then, a dream has sense and nonsense mixed—a common dream of the night. . . .”

Oliver broke in with a laugh. “Faith, and that is true too! I could tell thee a dream I dreamed, not so long since. . . .” But he stopped suddenly, and went off to something else, saying, “You said, as I thought, that Rackham's speech was but gibberish, all mad out-right?”

“I did not mean that. I should have said, belike, that all the substance of his tale was mad, though he spoke it, plain enough. . . . But tell me thy dream, sweet Oliver.”

Now Sir Oliver had begun to speak of this dream—which was that unholy dream of his mother's ghost, whereof the reader knows—recalling only the strangeness of it, and forgetful of the many links it had with what he had least wish to speak of of all things, to Lucinda of all people. A moment's thought brought repentance of his word in haste, and now he would have unsaid it. But what shift was open to him? To swear he had forgotten it? Absurd! He might have devised some other dream, to serve as well, with a quick wit. But, as it chanced, no such expedient crossed his mind. And what need was there either to say anything of the time of it, or its associations for him?

“'Od's bodikins!” said he at length, with an ill-at-ease laugh. “Can I be sure to recollect it right? What

was it? There was my mother, a-walking on the Terrace with her head wrapped up, and there was a fountain, and fish in the basin, and one of them had John Rackham's head on. . . . No, my Lucy, I am not making it up. 'Tis true!—I swear it." But, said Lucinda then, this dream was mad all through; where was the touch of sense in it? "Stop one moment," says Oliver, "while I tell thee. Sense enough in all the garden round. 'Twas the Box Walk at the New Hall—thou knowest?"

"Ay—I know it well."

"This Bedlam fountain had grown in the night—for I had been there but the day before—just at the garden end, there where a little door went to the stable-yard, that never was opened. . . ."

"Oh, but it *was* opened, Oliver mine! Else how could you have passed through?"

"What does the wench mean?" said Oliver sharply. 'And well might he ask! For Lucinda's words came of a heedless forgetting, not unlike his own when his tongue pitched upon this dream. She knew naught of this garden door but from the tale of the duel, told that day by John Rackham. But the words had passed her lips before she remembered this, to her confusion. Sir Oliver went on, roused and speaking harshly. "When did I go through? Who says I went through? I tell you, that door was never opened since my mother had it closed."

"I did not know it was there," said Lucinda, foolishly speaking her thought, never seeing how it clashed with her last words.

"Why—thou art a fool, girl! What can possess thee to talk such folly?" Sir Oliver laughed out roundly, but



something in his laugh grated. "How in the name of patience should you know I passed through it, if you knew not it was there?"

"Oh, Oliver!—it was not I, but Rackham that *knew* it; 'twas but a part of the nonsense he talked with Trant's fingers on his forehead. . . . Yes, Oliver, stop and I will tell you. . . ."

"Tell me in a word! What lies has that scoundrel been telling you? Trant's fingers on his forehead, in good sooth! . . ."

"Now, Oliver—be not so angry! Leave my wrists—you pinch them! What is it all but a piece of nonsense—the matter of a jest?" But Lucinda's heart goes as she speaks, and she is white and frightened.

His hands relax as they put hers aside, and he raises his head. He is now seated beside her, for he has swung his feet down from the cushion at the couch-head. His breath came short as he spoke, and she has no guess of the reason why he should be thus moved, the more that his words had but now a ring of unaccustomed welcome tenderness, quite other than that of the conventions of the stage in affairs of love, with the like of which from him she was often vexed, though she confessed it not. Now is he as though he would speak, but could not. However, an end comes of his silence, and he says, under his voice, "*What has he told thee?*"

"Why should I keep anything from thee, Oliver? If only I can bring it again to my mind to tell. But it was a maze of nonsense. This door he had in mind was that very same one you spoke of but now. Not, indeed, that I could have spoken to any memory of it, but I know the place in the wall where it should be, a pace to the left of the two yews, clipt to seem foxes. . . ."

“Ay—ay—ay! I know the door well. What tell you me of it? Speak on about Rackham. . . .”

“Why—he would have it, in this daffing of his, that after the duel . . .”

“What was the duel? You spoke of no duel. God’s my life!—what’s all this history now? What shall we have next? A duel—a duel!—and who fought this duel, I pray?” Then he made as though to laugh, as in scorn.

Now at this Lucinda’s heart quaked. But not so much that his voice was harsh, as in anger, as for the sound of his laugh, that had in it little of the life of true laughter. But no thought crossed her mind that the cause of his gasping thus was in the matter of her speech. Her fear was to see him fall suddenly, seized by the malady she was at all times now more or less in terror of. But it was best, so she reasoned, to show no sign of this fear, lest by doing so she should hasten a seizure that might else pass off. She would be wisest to hide all consciousness of anything amiss; that she felt sure of. So she answered him quietly enough, “That was the duel this crazypate Rackham must needs dream for thee to fight with . . . come now, Oliver mine, thou shalt guess whom he thought to match thee with . . . guess now!”

Then Oliver, in despair, caught at a half-hope that the groom, being clearly bewitched—that he had no doubt of now—had come short of telling a true story, and that what he had told had been some jumble of madness within reach of a true denial. It gave him heart for a less ill-fangled laugh as he made believe to guess, choosing always some name quite out of question, as though nothing could be too absurd. “Admiral de Ruyter, Lucy mine, the fire-eating Dutchman! Or, stay—I will guess better

than that! Good King Charles himself—ho, ho!” And his greater ease set Lucinda’s mind at rest again. But it was not to be for long.

“Silly man!” said she. “See, now, Oliver, I will give thee a hint, for a help to a better guess. Did you not say, but now, when I had thy foolish head in my lap, that you yourself had heard this drunken knave a-singing of my song of Lord Ferrers of the Dyke? . . . What!—no nearer for that? . . . Well, look, then, at this—I will make thee another present. I am convinced outright that this Rackham being in a sense bewitched, and making—one might say—a furmety of truth in falsehood, hath taken all the acts of this ballad-tale, fitting the part each plays to someone known to him. . . . What of that, dost ask? . . . Come, Oliver, thou art slow! What of that, in sooth! Why, listen, and put thy mind to the thinking of it out! Who should he light upon to play the frail young beauty of the ballad—who but myself, your Lucy? A sweet compliment! And even a worsen one yet for thee, Oliver mine! No wonder thou art glum and silent over it. But he packed thee not behind the wainscot, to be caught like a fox in hiding. No—do him that justice! He set thee to fight in the Park, out a mile beyond where thy mother lies—rest her soul! Come now, Oliver, I have all but told thee whose sword crossed thine—’tis thy affectation, not to guess. . . .” She paused as for an answer, with half-playful gestures of impatience, a foot that tapped the ground and fingers struck together quickly; then went on: “Who was the old man the lover slew—come, now, whose father was he? . . . Oh, Oliver, what ails thee?”

For Sir Oliver is on his feet now, and that hollow sound is his voice. Or, rather, what would have been his voice

had articulation made speech of it. What is it he is striving now to say? He is—he is—he is something he can find no word to tell; or, having found one, dares not utter it.

Lucinda is beside him in her terror. This is to her, surely, some new phase of epileptic seizure. It is all a part of it that he should thrust her from him—nothing he is answerable for.

But it is a thing that he persists in, holding her at arm's length, until, with slow effort and suffocated gasps, he at last finds speech—hard to hear through teeth half-clenched, hard to distinguish from mere convulsive breath, but still speech. And the same speech, again and again.

“Keep from me—keep from me—till you hear—till you know!” And then, in answer to the “Oh, why this?” of Lucinda—for she is helpless to say more—he says more plainly, with some recovery of speech: “Do you as I tell you, girl, and you shall know;” and then drops heavily back on the seat he has left.

As she comes to see in all this something terrible afoot she cannot grasp the meaning of as yet, her eyesight swims and her powers of speech have gone, leaving her rigid, motionless as a marble statue, yet with a buried longing to speak that never comes to more than a half-moan. But she can hear what he says.

“It was no fault of mine—this thing. I swear it. I never sought to kill him. Had he handled his weapon less well, I could have disarmed him. But this was no boy's play, with a sword-arm like his. I would my thrust had not been mortal—it was not my intent. O Lucy—Lucy!—had he parried that thrust, *I* might have been slain. 'Twas a choice of two—'twixt him and me. Who

dares speak more blame of me than of another in my place? Who would have done other than I did? O Lucy—Lucy!—had he not been such a swordsman, I might have cried off and none have called me dastard. But how could I choose, in honour, but meet his challenge as he gave it? . . .”

And then he pauses, as Lucinda speaks. But her words come as the words of one that knows not who hears her. “Do I know what all this means?” she asks, much as a dreamer, who wakes he knows not where, might question a bystander; and then goes on: “What is this he tells of some man he has slain?” And then suddenly she cries out: “Oliver!—speak the truth to me! *Who* is the man you speak of? *Who* is it you have killed?”

Then Oliver, however sick at heart he be, has no choice but to speak. “It was your father,” he says, and sits on silent.

So they remain, but neither knows how long. It may be a few seconds, or it may be hours, for any measure of time in the mind of either. She remains fixed and motionless, a very statue in her stillness; and as the flaring candles, now near their end, shift and flicker in the wind each time it blows open a loose casement, letting in a rush of music from the sea, her face shows white in the moonlight they give place to. Not a sound from either!—nothing against sheer silence but the life of the night without; the distant thunder of the shore, the cry of its responsive shingle; the wind that means to find in the hours of sleep new ways of moaning through the silent house and roaring in its chimneys, and now is rushing inland with the flying scud of foam below and vapour overhead to tell all who will listen what it means—that low bank of inky black it left upon the offing, and how



it will not be a laggard long. Make shutters fast—it is the storm! That is its word to wakeful ears; few enough now, so late is the hour!

But it may be Lucinda has heard no sound; has seen, has understood nothing since those awful words came from her lover's lips, "It was your father!" But it was her power to take their meaning that makes her now unconscious of all else. Had they failed to reach her mind, speech would still have been hers. But she knows the truth, and her heart is near dead with the knowledge of it. All is void and waste for her now, this side of the grave, and she is face to face with a Something—a thing to poison the sweet air of morning with the taste of blood, and dye the sunrays scarlet. A thing that, could she find her tongue to speak it, might best be uttered thus: "My sin has slain my father, and the guilt of his death is mine." But never a word said she, as she stood there, a soul in torture in a cruel void, filled with her own guilt.

The first to move was Oliver. He rose just as though he lifted a great weight in rising. He moved towards her as though it bore him down. He went with hands advanced as though to shelter the head that sunk so low. How comes it that he, who more than once has laughed aside all guilt as of murder done, on the false plea that the fair conditions of the duel assail the slayer of his brother—yes!—would have freed Cain from the curse God laid upon him—how comes it that he has fallen so low as this? How come his bold eyes to flinch from meeting those of the woman he has wronged?—he that has made light of a hundred broken hearts—has flung a hundred cast-off shames to his victims, to be worn as a livery at the bidding of a world of hypocrites, half-ready with applause of a



sort—ready, at least, to sneak off blame—for him? Where was all his old effrontery, that had been so good a friend to him so many a time ere now? The answer lay in this: that Nemesis had come upon him in the very form of the God he had blasphemed through a lifetime—Love himself. Love, with a sentence of intolerable doom—fruitless Remorse!

Fruitless, and he was to know its fruitlessness almost before its sting had time to reach his soul. For when in his blind despair of any speech that could palliate his crime, he sought, while he dared not try to get Lucinda once more in his arms, at least to take her by the hand, that hand—the memory of whose touch was still upon his face—struck him aside so fiercely that the ring upon it scored his flesh, and left him bleeding, though, indeed, he took no note of it. And then, with one long, piercing shriek, she started from him, well away to the farthest corner of the room; for he was betwixt her and the door, or she might have made for it.

Then she found her voice; or, rather, it should be said, she found a voice she did not know as her own. “Keep off—keep off—keep away!” it cried, using the words she would have it use. And then a word harder to say—“Murderer!” She had to force the voice to make it come. But it came in the end. And then, once spoken, she found it easier to speak, and knew the voice was her own that said again, and yet again: “Murderer—murderer—murderer!”

“God is my witness,” said he, using the form of speech men use to make a falsehood true, “that I am no murderer. All was fair betwixt us, for him as for me. O Lucinda!—had he been the slayer and I the slain, would you have called him ‘murderer’?”

She stood white in the moonlight, close to the open casement, her forbidding hands stretched out towards him, to make his distance sure. Her speech came quick and short, an undertone articulate with pain, but clear in accent and unmistakable in meaning. "I know nothing of how I might have named him—but this I know—for I loved you once, Oliver—oh, *how* I loved you!—I know his lips would never have touched his daughter's lips again—his palm should never have pressed mine, though I died for it. For, Oliver, I loved you, once!"

The man knew what he had lost, and would have caught at any straw to save his fall. But he had no heart for his own defence, all the more that he knew well that, in strictness, every law of the *duello* had not been observed; for was not his opponent already wounded when he made that fatal thrust?—a murderer's, surely, with that consciousness upon him. He had slain a man no longer able to attack him.

He strove to utter some plea for himself—any mock-justification was better than none. But his teeth locked over his words, and what he began to say went shuddering down to an inarticulate moan. All his mastery of himself was at fault; or, rather, all was blank, and he was a conscious nothing, in a void. And Lucinda's voice, for she spoke again, sounded leagues away: "I loved you once, Oliver—Oliver!"

Yet these last words were not her own, to his hearing, but had some accent of a speech he knew, or knew he had known once. How could he say when, now, in this mist? Then, for him, all things ceased.

For her, she had caught sight of it coming, the thing she feared, when his voice failed. She had seen the dire strain coming on the muscles of his face, the upward drag

upon the eyeball, and she knew beforehand what she should hear in a moment—the awful cry of the epileptic. Her fingers were too late to stop her ears against the sound, glad as she would have been to shut it out. Then she saw him fall with all his weight, and lie jerking and writhing on the oaken floor.

How came that great inky curtain to be hanging still above the distant sea, and never nearing the land? Rank upon rank of great white-crested breakers, lifting to espy the shore, and falling disappointed, but to rise again, spoke of the great wind that was rushing landward from the black pall of the horizon. And yet the storm itself was slow to come. But those clouds were heralds of it, whose speed across the outer blue made the high moon seem to fly for ever through an endless heaven. It could not be long, now.

Not long! For through the very heart of its blackness shot a sudden splintered shaft of lightning, all the length of the offing, and left it blacker than before. And the woman who came from the front doorway of the Manor House, that looked seaward, was in time to see it, and waited, listening for the thunder.

For there is none among us but will pause betwixt the first flash and the first voice of the storm's artillery, even though the stress and cumber of life be at its worst upon him. Lucinda's life had become, in this last hour, no other than a terrible dream to her, but she had it in her still to pay this tribute to the terrors of the storm. Even John Rackham, very late at turning loose the bloodhounds for the night, did not pass her with a mere hat-touch in silence, his usual greeting, but stopped for one moment to say, "Going to be a rough night, my lady!"

and then stood waiting for the coming sound. It came—a long, continuous roar that neither rose nor fell, too satisfied of its strength to need it now. That was for the time to come.

John Rackham took no heed at all of the ashy pallor of his mistress's face. Or if he did, he set it down to mere terror of the lightning, and the boding rumble of the coming thunder. But what she said next roused even his torpid and apathetic nature to some astonishment.

"Saddle the colt, my lady!" he exclaimed. "Would you ride out a night like this? See the storm brewing yonder."

For Lucinda's speech had been, briefly, that he should put the saddle on the young horse. She was minded to ride, and there an end! And when he made objection to this, she silenced him imperiously, saying: "Do my bidding, Master Rackham, for I tell you this—I am in earnest. Refuse me, and I go straight to Sir Oliver, and tell him of my own hearing, from your own lips, of the crazy tale you have thought fit to utter concerning him and my father. So be wise in time, and saddle the horse as I have told you. Have him in waiting in the stable-yard for me when I have made ready for the saddle."

John Rackham thought and waited—waited and thought; then began some objection, as that the young horse would go past control from terror of the lightning, and what not. But Lucinda cuts him short with "Do as I say, or I . . ."; and is turning to go, leaving her speech half-spoken. Whereat the groom is ready with assent: "Going—going, mistress! Ne'er-a-one gainsays ye, that I wot of," and is off to the stable-yard.

The great storm is coming quickly now, and darkness is

over the moon as Lucinda passes up the staircase to her sleeping-room. She finds an over-wrap—no more—such a one as she would use against a shower; then taking off some jewels, gifts of Sir Oliver's, leaves them lying by her mirror, and turns to go.

In the lobby she is accosted by Mrs. Trant, from the upper stairway: "Have you called, my lady?"

"I have not called. . . . Stop—go presently to Sir Oliver; not yet—in a little while." She said no more, but her pausing thus with a jerk seemed due, in all reason, to the sudden flash of dazzling lightning that was keen to search every corner of the house, and, by some mysterious force none understands, jarred every window-frame in its setting. By its light each woman saw the other, the vision of a moment. The one, on the stairway above, respectful, with a snaky smile, and green eyes concealing something—something with a satisfaction in it. The other, an ashy white face most of all, and two white hands. Else, a mass of rich black hair, all shaken loose, and a hooded riding-cloak. But the swift, eager cunning of Susan Trant sees that the fingers are all but ringless, and that the rope of pearls she was at such pains to twine, three hours since, is there no more. So back she goes to her room, to think out the unfinished thought that this suggests to her.

Lucinda, going, pauses an instant at the door of the room where Oliver still lies, breathing heavily, still in stupor. Then she opens it, and goes in. And is standing there again, once more, beside the man she loved, and hates.

Oh, the knife-edge in her heart, of Love and Hate at war! Oh that she could, but just for once, strain an enforcement of oblivion in her mind—thrust his crime

aside, and leave him what he was a few hours since—only to kiss once more the face she loved! The last expiring flicker of the last candle showed her the blood from his mouth the fit had left. But it was not *that* she shrank from as she stooped and kissed the stained lips. It was the thought in her heart: “This that I kiss is my father’s murderer.” Forgive her inconsistency, for she was sorely tried!

The rain was holding off, strangely, after a sudden shower of heavy drops, when she came to John Rackham in the stable-yard. All moonlight had gone, and his horn lanthorn was the only gleam through the blackness.

“Who said to you you should saddle Sir Oliver’s horse, John Rackham?”

“Who told me not to put his saddle on him, mistress? None, to my knowledge!”

“I tell you then, now, to take it off again. For I ride alone. And it is no concern of any but myself what hour of the night I choose to ride, nor in what weather.”

Mr. Rackham grunted. “Alone!” said he. Then, after nodding twice or thrice, at short intervals: “It’s not for my like to speak,” said he.

Lucinda pressed her hand to her brow. “Stop!” she said. And then a minute after: “Mount and go with me, to show the way.”

“The way to where, my lady?”

“The way to the ‘Cobbler with Two Wives,’ on the London road.”

Their horses’ hoofs, going at speed, were well out of hearing, and time had passed to boot. And whoever



heard the ominous sounds afar might have wondered at the storm's delay. But, then, on a sudden came a swift glare of lightning all across the sky, and close upon the heels of it its thunder, climbing sound on sound, culminating in an intolerable peal. The storm had come.

## CHAPTER XV

CONSCIOUSNESS came back slowly to Sir Oliver, but, till he regained his lagging powers of thought, showed him imperfectly what he was, or where. All the stress of his convulsion had died away by the time Susan Trant, leaving her room furtively, that she should not wake her mother, and without a light—for that would have meant the noise of a tinder-box—went shoeless down the garret-stair, and opened the door she had listened at two hours since.

What she had expected, that she found. Darkness, and a heavy breathing somewhere in the room. Where was he, the stricken man? Wait for the next flash of the half-spent storm to see. For the tempest has said its say, and nears its end, and has left a tale for the hearing of those who slept on, and heeded nothing of it. A tale for those to tell who waked through the darkness, and stopped their ears, and hid their eyes in terror. And a worse one yet for those roused from sleep by some intruding torrent; or, worst of all, to quench a fire kindled by some thunderbolt. The storm is dying now, and the thunder rolling happily away in other lands.

But a flash comes back and back, now and again. A flash that says—remember! And a muttered confirmation from a thunder-roll, that knows and could tell more. Such a flash shows Susan where Sir Oliver lies, over by the table yonder. And even in the instant of its passing she can see there has been blood upon his mouth, and on

his hand. It is the old story. She has seen it before, and knows that it will have its way, and end like the storm. And in near the same time; for, sharp as this storm has been, it has passed swiftly away, unlike that great storm the story told of, two months since, at the New Hall.

Susan Trant waits on for one flash more to see if there is any change; but none has shown itself. He lies still, breathing heavily. She can go, for a while certainly. She makes her way to the bedroom, and stands by the mirror, waiting for a lightning-flash to show her something she expects to find. It comes, and she sees the brilliants of the rings give back the light. She knows their story—they will never be worn by Lucinda again.

One by one she takes them, and there in the darkness can, by touch alone, fit each on its finger of her left hand. How well she knows its likeness to Lucinda's! Theft is not in her mind. She has some other object.

Surely jealousy is akin to madness. At least, its freaks are unaccountable to reason. And never did a jealous woman's exasperation conceive a stranger freak than this one that now has possession of Susan Trant's mind. To dupe an old lover back to the tenderness of long-past years—to cheat him as it were of a caress in the false semblance of the hated rival—that was her scheme. Her cunning taught her that his half-wit state, following on the fit, would play into her hands, and help the fraud. A crazy plan to all seeming, and yet . . . was it quite mad?—was it out of all nature?

Scarcely that; for, think of the story of her life. Think how, twenty years since, it was all aglow with her ill-fated passion for the fascinating young Squire. Think of her discovery that his every word she hung upon, his

every honeyed promise she put faith in, was just a lie, with a motive. Think how it broke upon her slowly what it all meant, as it does in such-like cases, and how she came to find the meaning of the word *love*, used by one in training for a man of pleasure, a neophyte of one of the worst powers of darkness. Think of the blank life meant to her, when she had perforce to shield herself from the malice of her little rustic world of gossiped behind a marriage-shelter, with a heavy fool for an accomplice—of the ferment of lies that rose as incense at the altar of a blasphemous sacrament, and made it suffocation. And think of all the years that had gone by since then, whose only alleviation had been these visits of Sir Oliver's to Kips Manor, with the poison in them that her sole share of their advantages was the painful privilege of waiting on the favourite of the time being—dressing her hair, keeping her robes in order. How she hated them!—poor girls, each to be flung away in her turn by the gallant man of fashion! But she had hated none worse than Lucinda.

It is nothing to the story or its purpose that Susan may have counted her marriage-vows to Farmer Trant as not binding in the case of a landlord—a man whose displeasure could send her husband packing off a farm his sixth grandfather held near two hundred years ago. But whatever her relations may have been with Oliver in the first ten years of her married life, it was all over and done with now. Cold indifference had congealed over a passion that had never been Love at its best.

She knew now, more of her own innate cunning and insight than from mere words heard, what Lucinda's last interview with Oliver had led to, and she felt assured that the insensible man's first dawn of reason would set

him to seek absolution for his crime. Could she, in the darkness there, so work on his obscured perceptions as to seem Lucinda to him, if it were only for a few moments? Often when a chance witness of endearments of Sir Oliver's—for he made no reserve in her presence—she had said to herself, in bitterness of heart: "A caress like that would have brought back me my youth, and made a forgotten sun shine on my world again."

She crept to his side in the darkness, and got his head in her lap, sitting on a stool that was at hand. As she raised him he showed that he had become conscious, though he lay half-helpless. He tried to speak once and again before he succeeded in uttering the word he sought for—"Lucy—Lucy!"

Susan Trant, as in response, bent over him and kissed his face. There was no lack of tenderness in her kiss. She could play that part; it had never been forgotten by her. Nor were her lips so changed in a few years that they should grate on a face to which they had once been welcome, even though its sense had not been in abeyance.

One might have thought no woman could have felt it gain thus to personate another, and drink, as it were, the draught that he who poured it meant for that other's lips. It only concerns the story to tell that in this case it was otherwise, and that the draught she drank fraudulently was a half-successful counterfeit of wine. However strange it may seem, it was to her, when the man's returning consciousness sought and caressed her hand, almost as though their hands still met, as of old, in youth. It was her hour, and again and again, there in the black darkness, she bent over him; again and again she kissed his lips, his brows, his eyes. And, to her, the hand that held and fondled what he took to be Lucinda's, was the

young Squire's again, out of the past. It brought back to her one evening twilight, at a harvesting, when the village beauty had come at once to the knowledge of her own folly, and her lover's treachery.

His speech was coming back now. What was he saying? "No murderer, Lucy, no murderer! Let them say their worst—'twas no murder! 'Twas on fair ground, and neither faced the sun. No, no!—no murder!" Then he paused a moment, and said, of a sudden: "But you *have* forgiven me, Lucy mine?" and kissed the fingers with the rings upon them he knew so well.

Then, thinks Susan to herself, how should she find a word she might safely utter? A recollection came to her—one of her mother, quite at a loss to tell whether it was her daughter that had spoken, or her mistress. The words she herself had then used, mocking Lucinda's, came back to her. "Surely, Oliver, surely!" said she. But her voice had in it a sadness, well feigned to fit the occasion.

Thereupon Sir Oliver seemed to arouse himself from his stupor, or else the effect of his fit was leaving him. "What am I doing here upon the floor?" said he. "Strike a light, wench! Call Trant, or some of them. Have I slept? What?"

Now, Susan's mimicry of Lucinda's voice had been a great success, but she knew she would not have such luck again. Nevertheless, as she slipped away from Oliver's side, making as though to call for a light to be struck, or brought from the burning log in the kitchen, which was rarely dead outright, she got courage to play the same trick again, from a memory of how Lucinda had called to her many a time. "Trant—Trant!" she cried, and her mockery of Lucinda's voice was apt and clever, as



before. "Get us light. We are all in the dark here." It might have been Lucy herself calling. Then she slips away in the dark up the garret-stair to her room, where the old woman still sleeps soundly, and is soon rid of Lucinda's dress and the rings, and then turns to in her night-gear with flint and steel and tinder, to get a light for her taper.

Sir Oliver calls after the departing steps he thinks are Lucy's: "Call the sleepy jade, Lucy mine! Don't go. Make the sluggard come." And then, staggering to his feet in the dark, leans on the table, dizzy. He can hear the flint and steel's sharp click in the garret, and a little wonders not to hear Lucinda's voice. But she will come back directly, so he thinks. Meanwhile, it is only by the utter strangeness of all about him that he knows he has had an epileptic attack. It has been so, thrice before, and he has come to know what this thing means. But he is clear enough about all that came before his unconsciousness.

He sees he is in luck. This woman is indeed entirely his own. This was a lucky fit, that softened her heart to him. Had it not been for her pity for his affliction, he might have had to wait for her words of pardon a long time. He was the first man, surely, the falling sickness ever wrought good for. Had it not been for that, could she ever have cried back upon the tone of voice in which she named him *murderer*? Could she ever have spoken at all a heart-whole forgiveness such as the one that sent rejoicing to his soul but now? The fit has done it, and he is in luck! But why does she not come back?

He is firmer on his legs, and feels his way to the door. A flash of lightning afar spares light enough to give him help to find it. He opens it, and listens for voices above.

But there is no sound beyond the flint and steel—chip, chip, chip, interminably.

It stops at last. Now she will come, surely!

Yes—a step on the stairs, and a light. But why does not that lazy woman come to carry it? However, she has to get some clothes on her back, certainly.

Sir Oliver's eyesight is not at its best, and little wonder! But there should go some reason to the very worst vagaries of a stricken power of vision, falling sickness or no! Was it reasonable that Lucinda, who went upstairs but a moment since in silk brocade, should now seem clothed in some grey dingy wrapper—and barefoot too!—what did it all mean? He could see, by the flickering taper's gleam below, the white feet on the stairway and the skirt of grey homespun. But the face—the face—his eyes were so eager for—was lost in the shadow of the free hand held up to shield the light. The skirt and the feet his mind accepted, or was too unhinged to question. But that hand!—how about the rings? Was he not kissing it a moment since, in the dark there—knowing them there, and avoiding them with his lips?

"Where is lazy Susan, Lucy mine?" he asked, but more because he longed to hear her voice again than from any concern about Susan.

The wrong voice, in return, took him grievously aback. "Is not my lady still with you, Sir Oliver? She called out to me but now to bring a light, and I would I could have struck it quicker. But she is still below here, as I think."

"She is not, I tell you, Mrs. Trant. I heard her foot-step on the stair, mounting to your room. But now, I tell you, but now—five minutes since—or scarcely!" He is all in a tremor as he speaks, while she remains still

calm and respectful, her common manner with him in these later years, now that all familiarities are at an end between them; not that this meant any amendment of his life at heart, but solely came of inclination dead, and other fruit to pluck elsewhere.

She is most collected now, certainly, and her respect of manner seems to veil ridicule or commiseration, or both mixed. Why this excitement?—it seems to say. But her words are, “All is well with my lady, Sir Oliver. No doubt she is out above, on the terrace, to see the lightning. I had not heard her pass for the noise I made.”

Yes—that would account for it, of course. Oliver perceives that all these nervous fancies are due to his accursed seizure. Else he would have seen this himself, at once. Of course she has gone out on the roof, there where they saw the sea-battle together. She knew the lighting of a candle was no matter of an instant.

He passes by Susan Trant, and goes after her, as he thinks, up the stair. Susan’s face has no need to conceal her malicious joy, now his back is turned. She is in a strange mood, of love and hatred mixed. But, indeed, she has never known whether she most hated or loved this man, since the hour of his treason. Even as she sat beside him, his head in her lap, rejoicing at her trespass on Lucinda’s field, the question half rose in her heart, “Why not a knife?”

And so she waits at the stairfoot, to hear what will be the outcome. Her hair is rich, falling now in a tangle about her shoulders, and fluctuating on her bosom in the unsteady candle-light. In the daytime, close-braided and hidden by a coif, it only half tells what the village beauty was in those old days. Now its rich confusion makes a setting to the unfaltering gleam of those eyes, steely-

cruel with a blueness that is almost green, to the lips that patiently await a smile of pleasure at a coming sound.

It comes with an exclamation from above, which may be, not unlikely, a curse for herself for her misleading information. Then Sir Oliver is back again, seeing only that she has been mistaken in her hearing, not for one moment suspecting Lucinda's absence from the house. He is unsteady in his walk, and wrathful in his speech.

"Fool of a woman," says he, "to send me such a goose-chase! Your mistress is below. Come you and bring the light." For where else can Lucinda be, since her voice has been heard outside the room she was in last? Sir Oliver swings angrily down the wide stair, reeling more than once, and makes for the kitchen. The thought in his mind is that Lucinda, impatient of the wearisome operation of the tinder-box, has run for a light to the kitchen-fire, and will be found kindling a flame with the bellows from the smouldering log on the hearth. Yet when he enters the kitchen, expecting to hear the flap of the bellows—before Mrs. Trant, who is behind him, can show the light—there is no sound, and the taper's light flickers on an empty room. But so confident has he been, that he speaks into the darkness as he pushes the door open: "Why, my girl!—What, Lucy!—What, all in the dark? . . ." and then stops suddenly, with, "What has got the wench? Where can she be?" He shuts his lips determinedly on his resolve to find her, and, taking the candle from Mrs. Trant, goes quickly, becoming steadier as he walks, to each unvisited room of the house in turn. When he has entered the last one in vain—it was the great untenanted ballroom where Susan Trant had bewitched John Rackham—he turns to the woman who has followed

him and says—this time with more of terror than anger in speech half-articulate from the injury to his mouth—“Where can she be?” With the constant disappointment of each time not finding her, the longing grows and grows of once more holding the hand, once more touching the lips he thinks he has not lost, once more hearing their words of forgiveness of his sin. For it was no murder. Lucinda now feels, believes, knows, that it was no murder.

“My lady has never gone to the stables. ’Tis the one place left now.”

“You are a fool, Susan Trant!” was all Oliver had to say to this. But he paused for thought a moment, and at the end of it was minded to think his speech was rash. For the tale of John Rackham, which his fit had beaten aside for a while, came back to him now. How if Lucinda had heard the groom moving about—for he would often rise in the night, perhaps thinking to surprise some witch tampering with the horses—and had purposed to get from him some further light on the duel story? It was more than probable. Yes! that was the solution of the mystery. His heart had become quite light over it. “No—for once you are no fool,” said he. “That is where she is—the stables—the stables!” And it seemed all the more likely when he reached the side-door of the house that led out to the stable-yard, seeing it had been left open. For, indeed, that was the door Lucinda had opened from within, over two hours since.

The storm had passed, and left a sky rainless but dark, with promise of the moon’s return from a silver gleam upon the sea, when Oliver went shouting out into the night to find the woman he sought, more sure than ever this time that he had run his quarry home. “Lucinda, Lu-

cinda! Where art thou in hiding? My dear—my love!—what's all the tale about? John Rackham, you drunken knave, come out—where are you?—come out!”

But for all that he shouted, there came no answer. Then was his moment of bewilderment, and it stunned him. For till then there had been at each disappointment a resource to turn to for succour. He gasped once and again as though he would have spoken, then went quickly to the stable, calling to Susan Trant to bring the light, which she did, shielding it carefully from the wind. He had barely time to make sure that the stable was empty of all but one horse, and to see that it was the groom's horse, not his own, when a gust of wind blew out the light. Mrs. Trant said, as though no perplexity were afoot, “Never mind!—I left another lighted within”; but a shade more of perturbation would have been better policy. For Oliver turned to her furiously, crying out, “You jade, you know more of this than you tell of!” And then ran away, shouting, “Lucinda, Lucinda, where are you?” So he went through the house again, from room to room, and then she heard him, so calling, along the house-front and to the paved yard where the dogs ran out to meet him, barking, and then round the back of the house and farther afield, like a madman, still calling, “Lucinda—Lucinda—where are you?”

But she, laughing to herself, went back the way she came, and found her mother just awakened, and asking who was calling without so loudly, and what had taken her from her bed to be thus about the house without a light. For she had slept through the lighting of the tinder, to be awakened by the sound of Oliver's voice at last. Thus it is with many deaf persons, who will sleep through the firing of guns, to wake at a word from human lips.



Surely few men, and fewer women, if any at all, have ever ridden through such weather as Lucinda faced in her madness that night. The groom followed her persistently, thinking at the outset that she would be glad to turn back of her own accord, at the first heavy torrent of rain. But, as it chanced, this lagged behind the first outburst of the storm in lightning and thunder; and they had ridden over a mile, at speed, before it came. Then Rackham tried persuasion. Would not his mistress, if she would not turn back, at least consent to shelter awhile? He knew a shelter hard by, no great distance off their path, if she would but take it now. Another five or ten minutes, at a like speed, and there would be no refuge of any sort all through a five-mile ride over a bare hill-side, till they should reach the London Road. But he got no answer but a laugh, and, "See you lose not the way, John Rackham!"

It was none of his doing that he parted with my lady—this was his tale afterwards to Sir Oliver—at the Cobbler with Two Wives. My lady would have her will, and her will was that Sim Trusslove should saddle and ride with her as far as Bury, and she would give him a guinea for his pains, for bringing of him out on such a rough night. And what could he, Rackham, do upon that, with my lady's turn of speech with Sim, and a guinea to back her bidding? Moreover, my lady had said to him that he must hasten back to give help to his master, seeing that Sir Oliver had fallen in another attack of his malady, and would want him to be beside him as before. But Rackham said never a word—trust him!—of the threat that had brought him to accompany her ladyship in the first instance.

He told his story honestly enough, this one suppres-

sion apart. Perhaps he was none the less accurate, that, as he told it, Susan Trant's eye was upon him, and he was now afraid of her at every turn. Each was giving a version of the events of that night, near upon thirty-six hours later, when Sir Oliver, whose revival of any coherent consciousness or power of judgment was even then a recent matter, broke out angrily, saying: "An end of these lies! Tell me when my lady rode from this house—how long after midnight?"

"It was on the stroke of twelve I loosed the dogs for the night. My lady bade me saddle up the colt within a quarter of an hour. . . . When did we ride away? Another quarter—or it might be less. How else had I been back before daylight?"

But both his hearers cried out together against this; saying, how, then, could the Lady Lucinda have called for a light at near three in the morning, seeing by that time, if Rackham's tale were true, she must have been well on her way to Bury, with young Sim Trusslove for escort, while Master Rackham himself would have started to return to Kips Manor; where, indeed, he had arrived about five in the morning, to find Sir Oliver still rushing about as one mad, and seeking to find in his bewilderment some trace of Lucinda? For had he not heard her voice, felt her touch, so short a time before the two of them had found the stable empty?

Now, had Mrs. Trant not ventured on that simulation of Lucinda's voice, calling for a light, and then made claim that she herself had heard this voice, she might have laid the whole strange, inexplicable business at the door of Sir Oliver's aberration of mind, following on his seizure. For was any man so stricken to be held responsible for all he might fancy on recovery? In fact,

when he spoke first before Rackham of Lucinda's presence with him at so late an hour, Susan Trant had rashly hinted that the whole thing was but the illusion of a dream, bred of the very malady itself. On which Oliver had turned upon her sharply, saying: "Was it a dream, too, that you heard her call for the light?" To which she, being taken aback—for she had forgotten her own words—could say nothing, and could only confess to a complete bewilderment.

So, seeing that the groom held firmly to his tale, and that his own conviction of Lucinda's presence beside him when his fit passed off was too deep-rooted to be shaken, Sir Oliver was near to distraction from perplexity and feverish effort to get behind the facts and find their explanation. He got no nearer by any pressing of the groom and the tirewoman to vary in their story; and as for old Hatsell, she either could or would say nothing further than that she had heard horses below late overnight. Sir Oliver, therefore, after over an hour of useless endeavour for enlightenment cut the interview short, and bade them all begone about their business, for that there was never a word of truth in the tale of any one of them.

But then, as Mrs. Trant and Rackham are waiting only to be out of his hearing to embark on mutual accusations of falsehoods—he in good faith, she in bad, for she knows his story true—comes Sir Oliver's voice, calling after Rackham: "Come back here, you, John. I have something yet to say to you." Whereupon the groom goes back, not over-willingly.

"What's all the tale of a witch-trick this woman has played upon you, John Rackham?"

"Upon me?"

"Upon you! Speak up and make no concealments with me, man! You had best not, for her sake and yours."

Whereupon Rackham, after saying sullenly, "Suppose I tell you the truth on't, master!" and getting for reply a curt "Suppose you do!" goes on to give such an account as he may—for his brain is in much confusion over the whole story—of his first obsession or bewitchment by the woman Trant, and what came of it; always putting the blame at her door, and also laying claim to having kept back much of the tale of the duel, when compelled to tell it to Lucinda. That Trant was a witch, and in league with the Evil One, he was convinced—who could doubt it? For his part, he should always say Mrs. Trant had a hand in Sir Oliver's own disorder. The reason of his resentment against her, of course, was that it was through her agency that he had become involved with Sir Oliver, owing to his disclosure of the duel, which might else have remained for long unknown to his mistress. Otherwise he had till now been on reasonably good terms with her. "But," said Oliver, "how the Devil could she make such a fool of you? That's what I want to know." Rackham confirmed and enlarged his story, adding: "Maybe you've seen a gamecock hold his bill to a barn-floor, for naught but a chalk line down the middle of it?" Oliver answered: "Ay, once and again! What of that?" "There be the trick on't, Master Oliver," said Rackham. "Just that, and no witchcraft—that's *her* tale. But I count her a liar."

Sir Oliver kept silence as to his own belief or disbelief in the woman's alleged league with Satan, but his looks were black enough to warrant Rackham's speech to her when they next met. "I would make peace with the master, if I were in your place, Mistress Sukey, for fear

of worse." To which she said not a word, but the groom had an impression that she laughed behind her breath. And this impression grew upon him in her absence, so soon as he had had time to forget that she had not really laughed aloud.

In the evening that followed he overheard somewhat of a stormy interview between Mrs. Trant and Sir Oliver, which he, for his part, ascribed at first entirely to his master's anger at her share in his own revelation about the duel, whether it were connected with witchcraft or a mere freak in the natural law. But it reached his slow intelligence as a strange and noticeable thing that Susan Trant's voice should show so wild and passionate a tone, rising strenuously above Sir Oliver's and, as it were, silencing it. And, strangest of all, that she should address him by a name she never used in the hearing of the household. "Squire Raydon" was quite unwonted. Rackham heard enough to concoct in his own mind a story near the truth, but not all the truth. However, he went very close to assigning the true relations of Mrs. Trant and Sir Oliver, honouring them with a grin and a dismissal, as too slight and usual a matter to need notice.

For the truth is that Oliver, after a day spent in helpless chafing or mere morose silence, pacing to and fro within the house, or wandering aimlessly along the shore in the sea-wind, had given way to his anger against this woman—an anger that had grown with the return of vigour of mind and body as the effects of his seizure passed away. It had always been thus with him in the like case; and when, after going through the form of being served with a dinner he scarcely touched, he broke out in bitter accusation and reproach against Mrs. Trant, she

was not surprised one whit, and turned upon him in her defence as one ready armed at all points.

"How was I to know the drunken knave's tale was a true one? It was none of my choosing which of your villainies he should blab upon. For a villain you are, Squire Raydon, and who should know it better than I? Who could have said 'twas any malice of mine—the simple question, what was the true name of your last victim? Who could have guessed there was murder behind the story of it? Yes, *murder!* . . . Yes, I tell you—*murder!*" . . .

"You lie, Susan Trant; before God, you lie! It was no murder. It was as fair a duello as ever men fought yet. And the challenge was his, you jade, the challenge was his!" . . .

The woman cut his speech across, with swift detection of its falsehood. "What choice did you give him but to send it? Answer me that! Would you have had him submit to his daughter's dishonor, and his own!—say never a word?—raise never a finger?" . . .

"The girl was old enough to know." . . . Sir Oliver, speaking thus, sullen and scowling, but livid of lip and bloodshot of eye, cut but a sorry figure, for all his beauty, as he winced before Mrs. Susan, who seemed to have cast aside her self of yesterday, so changed was she from the decorous tirewoman Lucinda knew. It may be that, though the story has not seen her so, she would have this seeming more or less whenever none other was by to guess from it her old relations with Oliver.

At his speech she let fall the last reserve between them, as of master and servant, breaking into a long, mocking laugh, and crying out: "Old enough to know! What girl is ever old enough to know, till no gain comes



of knowledge? Where would you look for your harvest, Squire Raydon—you and your like—if little wenches could be wise in season? Old enough to know! They'll never be a penny the wiser, poor souls, for anything they will ever be learned by folk who want them to be ignorant, for to keep the world a merry world, to their liking. Old enough to know, forsooth!"

"Fool of a woman!" said Sir Oliver. "She was at least old enough to know Lady Raydon was living. All the countryside knows that."

Mrs. Trant had a sharp answer ready, and was not the least afraid to utter it. "Ay, truly, she might have known you for the scoundrel you are, Squire Raydon. A girl is told not to love another girl's husband—they are let know that much. But they never know the right of things, any more than I did." And she busied herself, immovably, over matters of the table, while Oliver still sat where he had eaten, his chair pushed back, a restless, tremulous hand wandering over a chin two days unshaved, or through the rich locks Lucinda once loved, always glowering askant at the seeming unconcerned woman. For he was afraid of her, for all his bluster, and was half ready to suspect that his delusion of Lucinda's presence, when he revived from his stupor, was but another sample of Susan Trant's witchcraft. But he did not indulge this suspicion much; the vividness of the impression had taken too strong a hold. Besides, Mrs. Trant had heard Lucinda's voice calling her, or said she had.

It was curious that he should accept her word on this point; it was such an easy thing to say! But she had overplayed her part, and it was ill for her that she did so. For all Oliver's bitterness of feeling turned towards

her, and became a congenial resource to countervail his love for Lucinda—a love of a new sort that his evil soul was in revolt against—a love that might have purged that soul of its grossness, if he had not dashed from his lips, half-tasted, the cup of his purification, suspecting it was not unholy. And he formed in his secret heart a plan of revenge. Susan Trant was a witch, and should pay for it.

Therefore, when, on the following day, having by then had time to recruit his shaken health, and to resolve upon a course of action, he rode away with John Rackham to retrace his journey to the New Hall, from which he had now been absent eight weeks, his first halt was at Bury, the assizes town; his intent being to lay an information for witchcraft against Susan Trant, knowing well that such information, coming from one who had formerly been her protection against a like accusation, would have such force that a warrant would at once issue, and that Mistress Trant would be clever indeed in her defence if she contrived to escape burning at the stake. For in those days the readiness of persons in authority to lend an ear to accusations of witchcraft was so great that, of those against whom they were brought, few if any escaped; the innocent being confounded with the guilty, and all being subjected to torture to procure evidence against themselves from their own mouths. Well might Sir Oliver feel confident that John Rackham's deposition, which he made somewhat grudgingly before the local magistrate—giving, however, in the end the whole account of Mrs. Trant's evil practices at his expense, and stating, although he referred fairly enough to the gamecock explanation, that on the occasion of his

story to Lucinda he had himself seen more than one familiar imp or spirit attendant on her—would be almost enough by itself to convict; but that, backed by his own evidence of what he had heard from Lucinda, and his attributing his own malady to Susan's enchantments, no defence would have a chance. So that, after both their depositions had been duly entered and formally sworn to, Sir Oliver rode on his way rejoicing as at a good deed done, a public duty performed. For, believing as he did that Susan Trant was certainly in league with evil powers, his conscience was quite at ease. Truly his anger against the woman may have set the door of his mind ajar to this belief; but, once it was well established, his conscience jumped at it as an easement. For this Oliver could be a hypocrite in his own behalf on occasion shown.

## CHAPTER XVI

THERE is a room in Croxley Hall known to this day as "Sir Oliver's room," and to this day none knows why it is so called. Ask the man who has grown old there as caretaker, or his old wife, why it is called Sir Oliver's, more than any other, and neither will be able to reply. But the reader of this narrative may guess, as its writer has done, that this room, looking out across the lawn where that first epileptic seizure came about, got its name from the fact, that on his return from Kips Manor, it was the room its owner dwelt in throughout the day, not allowing the shutters of any other room to be opened, all having been closed during his absence. Such trifles often print themselves on tradition; while things of note pass from the memories of living men, even those that have touched them nearly.

For Oliver, having ridden almost day and night since he started—for his epilepsy never seemed to eat away his physical vigour, only a day or two being necessary for its complete reinstatement—arrived towards night-fall, to find the house to all appearance deserted. Failing to make his summons heard at the front door, he turned to the entrance of the stables, with no better luck. For his furious pulls at the swinging handle of the gate-bell met with no response. He could hear the movement of horses in the stable, and the dogs within barked furiously in answer to each fresh jangle of the bell. Thereupon he himself swore furiously back at them, but to no good

end. And, indeed, they were but doing the duty they were placed there to do.

But no man lives in a house from his boyhood that keeps not some secret corner in his mind that he can enter by, on a pinch, though every bolt and bar that others know be closed against him. John Rackham could get in, he would wager, round by the Nun's Postern, if he had not gone too full in the girth since he was a lad of sixteen, four-and-forty years ago. And he got into the house somehow, Oliver knew not how; for he waited for him at the front-door, chafing, and now and then breaking roundly into execrations, till he heard bolt and bar shot back within; and then the great door stood wide, and the dark and silent house was open to him; with John Rackham, somewhat frayed as to garments by his burglarious entry, but otherwise unmoved, the only soul to be seen. Then the two of them went about in the basement, and presently found old Mrs. Langdon, the housekeeper, who had been left in charge, sound asleep in her room, and, as it were, torpid with overmuch good living and too scant employment. Who, when fully aroused, was in great amazement at the sudden home-coming of the master. Why had he not sent on a messenger beforehand, that she might have known, to have all in readiness for him; and her niece back from the village, and Rachel Anstiss to wait upon my lady, and sundry others who had gone elsewhere for the time, with or without preconcert and leave given by the employer? But she would soon have the house in some order now, so soon as ever her son should return. This was the young undergroom who had ridden back from Kips Manor with two pack-horses, near two months since. She was voluble, and made as though to

go and find her mistress, whom she took to be awaiting Sir Oliver in the entry, or elsewhere.

But Sir Oliver would have none of that, saying the Lady Lucinda was not come, and would not come yet awhile. And till she came, not a shutter of the whole house would he have opened, and it would be the worse for whomsoever should open one contrary to his bidding. All but his own sleeping-room, and the little room named the Russet Room, where he would live and have his meals till the coming of the Lady Lucinda, which would not be long. Of whose return in the end he spoke with a confidence for which he had, as the story knows, no warranty. But it imposed on the household and perhaps on Oliver himself, and enabled him to make some parade of the temporary nature of his arrangement, that he took this Russet Room for his living-room, and would have no other. There for some while he passed his days in gloomy solitude, seldom leaving the house till after nightfall, and charging those of the household who returned to his service to keep silence about his home-coming, and deny him to all who came to seek him. And so the days passed for him, brooding constantly over his separation from Lucinda, angrily resenting the domination of this new power that forbade him laugh at this miscarriage of his connection with one mistress, and go afield to seek new pleasures and find forgetfulness. Why should he not make light of it, and brush Lucinda aside, as he had found it so easy to do before, with such a many?

He could not. He could not even resolve to return to the centres of gaiety and gallantry—to the vortex of profligacy that circled round the throne of a witty and worthless monarch; witty and worthless albeit lovable—none denied that. He wavered continually betwixt re-



solves to leave Croxley Hall forthwith for London, and counter-resolves to wait on vaguely in a groundless hope that the woman he had lost through his own folly would come back to him of her own accord. He could not bring himself to believe that this strange yearning for her, a longing he had never felt the like of before, could exist without some corresponding feeling in her own heart. And all the while he was angry with this usurpation of his rights over himself, which had come upon him in his own despite, and dictated loss of precious hours he might have spent in pleasure.

He could and did learn, without direct inquiry, that Lucinda was again at the Old Hall, with her brother. John Rackham could tell him this much, from gossip overheard. In a few days, too, came Rachel Anstiss, confirming this. Hearing that Lucinda was again at the Old Hall, she had applied there to know if her services would be required, and had met with no encouragement, though scarcely with a rebuff. She had then come on to the New Hall, hoping for better fortune by an application to Sir Oliver, and was not disappointed.

"It may be a little time," he said, "before my lady returns. Doubtless she is well provided for the time being, but when she comes back she will need a tire-woman, and will scarcely make a new arrangement without my consent, however confident she may be of it in the end." Now, in saying this much, Oliver outwent the familiarity he would have shown to a mere domestic under other circumstances, for the pleasure his own voice gave him in taking Lucinda's return for granted. And Rachel, a liar herself, could accept what she knew to be a lie as true, and did it so deftly that it deceived Sir Oliver; and thereon he was mightily well pleased with

himself, and almost believed for the moment that Lucinda would come. But Rachel, going away to the kitchen, said: "My lady This, and my lady That, forsooth! This one comes not back;—who will be the next one? . . . How come I to know she comes not back? Why—by the master's word his heart spoke, whatever way his tongue wagged. Any cradle-babe could speak to that."

But she brought from the Old Hall other gossip, and it reached Oliver. Some three weeks ago all the household had been roused from sleep by a piercing cry of a horsewoman who rode apace into the forecourt, about three in the morning, and the new Squire was barely in time to catch his sister, Mistress Lucy, as she fell forward; having dismounted and made shift to keep afoot till he could come, he having called to her from his window above to be of good heart but for a moment, and he would be with her. And how he bore her in and she lay to all seeming dead with the great stress of her fatigue. For she had ridden hard three days, with barely food or sleep enough to keep life in her, dismissing her last guide or escort as soon as she came to familiar ground; when, her own horse having broken down, she exchanged it for his, telling him to lead it to a village at hand, and say to the host of the Three Sheaves that it was Lucy Mauleverer's; who upon that would give him shelter and his keep till she could return his own horse to him. Further, Oliver could gather that Lucinda was for many days insensible or delirious, and at first Vincent, her brother, was in despair of her recovery, fearing that, if she lived, she would at the least lose her reason. But that by now she was recovered so far as to leave her room, and even to take some part in what there was of life at the Old Hall, though speaking little, and very pale and still, so that

she scarcely seemed herself to many who knew her well a year since.

All this, as Oliver heard it piecemeal, gave him a true enough image of the state of things at the Old Hall; but for many days after his arrival no news of it reached Lucinda and Vincent, who was now fully recognised and installed as his father's heir and representative, though in bitter grief for his father's death, and living in retirement, mixing no more with his neighbours and such local matters as called for him than was an obligation of duty and courtesy. That the fatal ending of the duel should be generally accepted by all who had concern in the affairs of the family was but a part of the wild and disordered time. When it is considered that at the date of this story but four years had passed since a Parliament was dispersed at the point of the bayonet, and that boys not come of age might still remember a scaffold in Whitehall dripping with the blood of a beheaded Monarch, while the memory of a devastating Civil War was still fresh in the minds of all men, this seeming apathy of judicial power in the case of one fatal duel seems not to call for special explanation. And the less so, that the right of Law to interpose upon the ordeal of battle was then looked upon with jealousy, so long as all due observance of chivalrous rule was shown; and indeed this jealousy is by no means dead in our own time. Add to this, that this feeling ran strongest in the very class to which Ralph Mauleverer belonged, the class proudest of its ancestry, even vain-glorious of its deeds of blood so long as Honour was unstained. When the Deputy Sheriff, who was a Round-head, made some show of a move toward calling Sir Oliver Raydon the Royalist to account, he met with no sympathy from the friends of Squire Mauleverer, all

Royalist also to the backbone. Even the slain man's second, though he more than suspected that when the fatal thrust was given old Ralph was hampered by a wound that should have parted the combatants, would lend no help to a canting, psalm-singing accomplice in the murder of his King. So the matter dropped, and bid fair to be forgotten. But when Vincent reappeared from Virginia, there were those who looked to hear more of it as soon as Sir Oliver should be forthcoming to answer a challenge.

But no news of Sir Oliver's return to Croxley Thorpe reached the Old Hall till many days later. For of all perversities, the worst is that of Rumour, who will often keep silence against all reason on matters close at hand, even while she tells of things afar almost before they come to pass. The news came in the end, Heaven knows how; and when Vincent told his sister of it he had no better answer ready to her inquiry, how was this thing known, than that there seemed to be no doubt of the fact. But the question was soon set at rest, for Rachel Anstiss came again to the Old Hall—she being near of kin to the lodge-keeper—telling how she had taken service again with Sir Oliver, and talking always as though Lucinda's return was held certain at Croxley. But she got no speech of Lucinda, though it may easily be she had received instructions from her master to bring back all the news she could glean of her mistress's health and future plans, for all that she made no claim to be the bearer of any message.

Thus it came about that same evening that Vincent and his sister, being alone together in the twilight, and no lights as yet in the great drawing-room, he spoke again to her of this arrival of her lover as a certainty, and of the reason he came to know it. But, as though he would not

peer into her mind on the hearing of it, he never looked round from the window recess, where he stood watching out the last embers of a stormy sunset. Yet he need not have been so nice, for Lucinda never changed colour nor lost self-command, sitting always at the clavichord in the half-light, touching it now and again as the fancy took her. Presently she spoke, never faltering at all, but as one at ease.

“You saw the woman, Vincey? The woman Anstiss, I mean?”

Then, hearing a voice so well in control, Vincent left the window and sat by the harpsichord. “I saw her and talked with her,” said he. “She is again in service with—with *him*; in some false hope, as I gather, of your return.”

“You told her?” She paused on a chord, having touched one lightly.

“Oh yes—made it quite clear.”

“She knows the story?”

“Darling girl!—all folk know the story, or know one half of it and guess the other. But she seems to have helped this false hope by what I suppose to be a mistaken interpretation of something she has noticed—in *him*.”

“Of something she has noticed? . . .” She paused inquiringly, but struck the chord her fingers had waited for, gently.

“Yes. But I only half like talking of it, dear child. . . .”

“I do not mind it. Tell me!” And again she struck the harpsichord.

“Anstiss imagines that . . . that *he* is brooding over your absence, and himself believes you will return. She

describes him as either walking purposelessly to and fro on the terrace, or dwelling on certain letters, which she is confident are in your writing; and though she cannot read, or but a little, she would be quick to identify it—all the quicker, perhaps, that she sees not the many hand-writings there be that are like it. . . . What I mean—what I should say—is, she would think it yours the quicker from little note taken of others like it. . . . O Lucy!—what? . . .” For her hands had fallen from the keys, making a discord, and he could see from the rise and fall of her bosom that her tranquillity had broken down at the hearing of something he had said.

“Oh, Vincey, darling boy, do you not see? It is his love—his love that breaks my heart!” And then she started from her seat; and, as he rose, fell into his arms weeping bitterly. And then Vincent saw there was a thing he had not understood—a thing it is not given to many men to understand at all; a something of the nature of a woman’s love. For he had thought that it would die outright in her heart, this love for a man who had slain a father such as theirs. Could he have found it in him to speak the words, he would have besought his sister to crush out all that was left of her love for a murderer, and help him to his retribution. But he could not draw his sword against him with that cry in his ears from a sister’s heart, telling of a love that refused to die. And he knew it, even while the ring of Oliver’s steel upon his own would have been the sweetest sound his ears could hear. And what had his compact with Oliver been? True, Lucinda had trusted him from her—had left him for good and all. But how act on the mere letter of their parting only while the spirit of Lucinda’s love remained? So he said nothing for a while, only



giving such consolation as he might, which was but little; and yet something, for she loved this brother dearly.

Then, when she was calmer, he spoke, referring again to these letters Anstiss spoke of. "Had you written him a many letters, little Lucy?" said he.

"Not such a many!" she replied, but not at once. And then she made a kind of little undersound with closed lips, as of consideration, and said further: "No such number as one might have thought, seeing all things. Nor long ones, neither, for that matter."

"But thou hast written him long letters, Lucy mine?"

"What is a long letter, Vincey darling? One wrote o' both sides?"

"Indeed, a good penman might call that but a short letter at best. Three pages o' both sides, little girl! That's a long letter!"

Lucinda's head was lying on her brother's shoulder with eyes closed, as with fatigue of grief, as she answered languidly: "I never wrote so long a letter to *him*. . . . What, Vincey?"

"Why *what*, darling?"

"Because you gave such a jump." For Vincent had started, for a reason we shall see. But he made light of it then, saying a great fly had struck his eye. Also the hoofs of a horse rang on the stones of the forecourt. It was Roger Locke, the foster-brother, for whom they had been awaiting supper.

"How comes the woman to be so sure this letter was Lucy's?" Roger Locke asked this question, as he sat with Vincent after meat, Lucinda having left them, meaning to lie down—not from any custom then practised, but from sheer weariness of soul and body alike.

"The woman Anstiss?" answered Vincent. "Why—she admitted, when I pressed her to tell me truth, without reserve, that she had taken advantage of his absence to read the signature of the letter, which he had left open on his table. I suppose he thought she could not read, but she could read that much, though what came before puzzled her." Oliver's name, take note, was rarely mentioned by either. It was always "him" or "he."

"And this was a letter of three sheets, and our Lucy says she never wrote. . . ."

"Never wrote *him*? . . ."

"Yes—never wrote him more than a sheet at most."

Vincent inclined his head. "So she says," said he. But he sat watching Roger, as though he expected more.

"Why do you look so, Vin?" said Roger.

"Because, dear Roger, I have an idea in my head, and I would fain know if it is in yours also."

"An idea?"

"Roger, think a moment on this. How many sheets were there in that . . ."

". . . That letter to her father? Her own beginning, on the wrapper, and three blank sheets . . . !"

"Have we ever explained it?"

"No!"

"I see it now."

"So do I. My God!—what a miscreant he is!" For the story of that letter was clear to both as soon as the clue was given—the three-sheet letter in Lucinda's handwriting, still in possession of her betrayer.

The next day passed, and the next, and on the morning of the third Roger said to Vincent: "We have to make up our minds, Vin."

"Whether the letter shall or shall not be shown to Lucy?"

"Ay! I was against it at first, whatever the explanation was. I am not so sure, now we know."

But Vincent seemed in great doubt. "Would it not be mere cruelty," said he, "to put upon her the pain of knowing the full scope of his wickedness; with little chance, to my thinking, of her love for him coming to an end. Oh, Roger, you but half know the strength of her infatuation."

"We have been of an age from the cradle, Lucy and I, and I know her heart as though she were my twin. Give her this knowledge that these papers Anstiss tells of are not, as she thinks, her own old letters kept and re-read for love of her by this damned traitor, but the very words she wrote to her father, not knowing him slain. . . . Oh, Vincent, all her love would turn to hate. . . ."

"Yea—but our Lucy—our Lucy! Would she be the happier? It would be a joyful day for me—for you—that left us free to deal with him, not that you stand pledged as I do. . . ."

"I hold myself pledged, by your wish," said Roger.

"And mine is the prior right, dear Roger—the right of blood. She is mine own sister, and he who lies dead . . . was my father." He could speak again, a moment later, and went on: "But Lucy—Lucy—would she be the happier—to hate him?"

"Will she ever learn to love any other, if she learns not to hate *him*? No, Vincent!—better far she should know the whole truth, cost what it may, than fill her mind with a false conceit of him, wide of his true villainy. Tell her the truth, I say, and risk it."

"Hush!—she is coming," said Vincent. But he spoke

a few seconds too late; for that day, towards sundown, comes Lucy to him, seeing him alone in the garden, and says: "What was it 'twixt you and Roger this morning that you spoke so earnestly and so long?"

"We speak very little but of one thing, Lucy. It would be that."

"Then it was something not aforetold by the manner of your speech, dear Vincent. Tell it me now."

Then Vincent cast about in his mind whether it would not be best, after all, for Lucinda to know the whole story, all the more for her resolute self-command and seeming readiness, if need were, to face worse than had come to her yet. But, indeed, when she saw him hesitate in perplexity, she pressed all the more to be told the thing he stuck about the telling of, and left him no chance of escape. So says he to her, "Wait a moment till I return," and goes away; but comes back presently bearing three or four sheets of letter-paper folded, whereof he opens one, and, handing it to her, says, "Lucy, what is that?"

She takes it from him, with a new terror in her heart, she knows not of what. Then, seeming merely puzzled, turns to her brother, saying, "This is the letter I wrote to our father. It came here after. Why not?" But the terror is coming in her voice.

Says Vincent then, putting his arm about her: "Ay—Lucy! It came here after. But where be the second sheet, and the third?"

"He knows best who opened it. It was before your coming. Roger—was it not?"

"Roger opened it, and found naught but what you have there, and these three blank sheets."

She took them from him, turning them either way, as though there might be writing. And then, with a great

effort to be collected, says quickly: "I gave this letter to . . . to *him* . . . to despatch for the post. And I saw it in the hands of John Rackham the groom, as he rode away. Yes—and I had seen it near, in his hands, as he mounted to ride." She says this, clinging to her brother, her breath coming short; and then, "O merciful God, what is this? Oh, tell me, Vincent—tell me straight."

"You saw the sheet with the writing, Lucy. But it was folded with these other three and sealed. See how they held together, bent across."

She took the blank sheets mechanically, adjusting the letter's first folding with a trembling hand. And there, plain to be seen, was each pinch and crease of the paper fitting true in its place. She spoke wandringly. "My head goes," she said. "Was it the groom who took my letter from the cover? How could he break the seal? I made the seal myself."

"The seal was never broken, Lucy. How 'twas done I know not, if you made the seal. But your three sheets of writing were removed to make way for that blank paper, before ever a seal was there to close it. And the reason for doing it was that none here might know whence it came to tell you of our father's death. For, see—there is no place named in the writing."

"And what has come of the three sheets I wrote?"

Vincent, in fear of the effect of what he had to say, paused for a moment; then he said, steadily and clearly: "Rachel Anstiss saw them, in the hands of the man that had removed them." But his words seemed to carry no meaning to Lucinda's mind. She looked dazed, repeating vaguely, "The man that had removed them?" On which Vincent said, "Yes—the man that had removed them.

Oliver Raydon." Thereupon Lucinda seemed to come suddenly to the meaning of it all, and, giving a loud cry, fell. But her brother's arm was round her, and he caught her, and, lifting her, bore her into the house, and laid her on a couch in the great drawing-room.

For a day or more she was half delirious, walking constantly about alone, talking with herself, ghastly pale and wild of eye. Then came a quieter time, the effects of this last shock dying down, and at last one of greater self-command and a sad peace. She spoke of the past with her brother and foster-brother with no more pain than it would have cost her to keep silent; and her remembrance of the writing of her letter, and Oliver's carrying of it away to seal made all his infamous deception plain, and went as near to killing all trace of love for him in her heart as may be in any heart that does not turn easily to hatred. Though many hold that in no woman's heart can love ever be slain outright, even though hate be ready with a helping hand.



## CHAPTER XVII

It might have been well for Sir Oliver if, in one of his fits of wavering between remaining longer at Croxley Hall and departing at once for London, he had decided on choosing the latter course. But he could not bring himself to a final renunciation—for it seemed to him it would amount to that—of his last hope of Lucinda. She had touched him to the quick, and, selfish as his longing for her was still, a tiny seed had germinated in the rich soil of his selfishness, which, had an earlier weed-growth allowed it, might have reached the sun and upper air, and given his soul a chance of life. But it was thus with him, that he was half-angered with himself for knowing how he loved her, and impatient to be able to fling the memory of her aside, even as that of so many another.

By fits and starts he persuaded himself that that seeming presence of Lucinda—touch and voice alike—that came with his reviving consciousness after his last fit, was no more than a breath drawn in the atmosphere of the dream-world, when all its substance had passed away. And then his mind's reaction would decide that it must have been real, for there was always that perplexity of Susan Trant's tinder-box! How came she to be striking a light at all, except she heard a calling? It was no wonder the problem seemed insoluble to him, seeing he had only the memory of his mazed senses at the moment of his hallucination to go by, in his efforts to get at the heart of the mystery now.

So his mind ran back always on that last hour of his concord with Lucinda, before the idiot John Rackham had let himself be fooled by that accursed witch Trant and her bedevilments into blurting out the whole tale of the duel that was no murder. What a sweet hour that had been! Those, at least, were *her* hands that touched him then. He could almost persuade himself that he could feel them still upon his face—could still hear her voice of that hour in his ears.

All sentimental nonsense! He wanted change, to become his old self again. Get back to the sweet, vile life of town—that was his wise course now—and shake free of this puny slavery! Get back to the rattle of the dice, the jangle of the loose gold among the card-packs, the blasphemy, obscenity, and wit of Rochester, Sedley, Etherage, the merry, heartless King himself—not the least witty of them all—and last and most the women, daughters of impudence and vice, whose laughter made the downward road to Hell a merry one *in what was life*—the life of the honey-bee, that pauses *on each* flower only for satiety, then seeks inviolate blood elsewhere. A plague of this new inroad on his soul; it angered him only to be forced to the confession of it.

But it was there, in the heart of him, unmaking all his manhood—the manhood that whistles care to the winds, and defies God and Devil alike. What, after all, were these coarse beauties of the town, these painted jades, these made-up dollies—he had worse epithets than that for them, I warrant you—to set in the scale against one lock of Lucinda's black hair, one look from her eyes. Why fly to debauchery and drink from an ever-growing sweet content, that grew by what it fed on; that he feared to see the end of, even while he did not anticipate it?

Why, indeed, if the end had not come? But, alas!—he had flung all his treasure away and now was fain to replenish his empty purse by forged drafts upon the Bank of Pleasure, sure to be dishonoured in the end.

Well!—at least let him draw as long as his credit was good. Why be sent to the gallows for less than an honest felony? Off to London was the word! Pack and saddle! Pack the heavy baggage off—some quantity of it for this journey!—by slow waggon-carriage, to reach London, if all goes well, in a fortnight. One pack-horse load, such as we took to Kips Manor, will furnish forth a fortnight easily. A two hours' interview, or maybe an hour thrown in, with Durrell the steward, will settle all the business of the estate—shall Widow Hacket, whose rent was not forthcoming at Michaelmas, be left in possession or turned out?—shall a less price be accepted for the summer's hay-crop on the home farm?—or such-like points. As for his office of sheriff or magistrate, Sir Oliver had contented himself with a brief hand-note to each of his substitutes, alleging indisposition as a present excuse from resumption of duties; and, as for his future intended absence in London, out of sight was out of mind. Let them even get on as best they might! As for these rumours of folk dying by hundreds of the Plague, they were true enough, no doubt, of the common folk; the better sort were untouched. Never fret for that!

So, let it be a start for London, and to-morrow! Why make delay when none is needed? But first, give just a thought to this—could he but *see* Lucinda? If he got speech of her, but for a moment, might not the tongue he knew the powers of so well,—the tongue he had used so skilfully for many a woman's ruin—be made of service

now for his own salvation? It was worth a forlorn hope, especially as he might—might he not?—claim pardon already given. Could he not get on the track of an opportunity? . . . Yes, he could. Where was that busybody Anstiss? Ten chances to one she had been spying and prying.

Anstiss, summoned to the Russet Room by a prolonged jangling of Sir Oliver's bell, could tell all he needed for his purpose. My lady always walked out alone early; very frequently—indeed, almost always—in the rose-garden east of the house, to get the sun in the morning. What did "early" mean? Early meant very early, before a many were awake. Call it an hour before the family broke their fasts; that might be, as the days shortened now, half-past seven of the clock. The Squire (meaning Vincent) would ride till then about the estate, keeping an eye on this and that, making often a long round, and sometimes late. Who else was there in the house? Well—there was the Captain (Roger Locke, clearly), except he had gone to his regiment, and the two old ladies, the sisters of the late Squire, who remained much in the house, working at broidery work with the needle. And how came Mrs. Anstiss to be able to speak to these facts, seeing she had never lived in the house herself? Her reply was that her cousin the lodge-keeper's wife had a tongue of her own in her head, and as good an eye for what was plain to any sight as most folk, for all they might give themselves airs. This woman was of a shrewish temper, and would always take others to task for no fault of their own, and build up a grievance out of nothing.

Sir Oliver heard her out, paying no attention to anything she said that was outside his purpose and the plan

he was forming in his mind. His face was black with gloom and determination as he stood looking from his window with his back to her, seeming to hear her out. But his eyes and his thoughts alike were bent towards the Old Hall, there away beyond the tree-tops of his own Park. For the Russet Room is high up in the building, and was so called in those days from no colour of its own, but because from the window one might see the little village of Russet Cross, which is just against Lea Down, beyond which is the old Hall. And when Sir Oliver turned again from the window, saying, "That will do, Anstiss," he had listened to her no farther than to hear what had set him on a plan to see Lucinda, if it might be, in that time when she walked in the garden. Of which intent his mind remained full when the woman had departed, with a new grudge against him for his inattention and curtness. And he brooded over it till midnight, and it was with him after he lay down to sleep, and his prefigurement of how he would ride next day to the Old Hall—throw the dice once more in the game of life, as it were—crept into the heart of his dreams as he fell asleep, or waylaid them in the early morning.

It is very rare to dream, a second time, an old dream in its entirety; though some aver that this has happened, once and again. But that the place, the buildings, the fields and trees of an old forgotten dream should come anew into our sleep—this is no such rarity, if folk may be trusted to tell the truth when none can prove them liars. Indeed, most of us know how any little stirring of past memory overnight may haunt the thoughts of sleep and colour the images it forms.

It was so with Sir Oliver this night. Even as the waking world vanished from him, a resolve was afoot in his mind that he would *not* ride within sight of the Mausoleum in the Park on his way to the Old Hall, however much he might lessen the distance by so doing. He would not acknowledge the effort it cost him to keep in abeyance his memories of that terrible morning of the duel, and made believe that his hatred of the direct road was only bred of that detestable dream that hung about him still; that would have been dreamed all the same, mind you, if no duel had ever been fought at all! And certainly the effect on his sleep was to revive this dream itself, not the duel.

For as the hour came on of the dreams we most remember—the hour before waking—he found himself again making for the Box Walk, taking for granted the fountain he would see at the next turn in the pathway, round the corner of that yew-hedge. His thought to himself was—that then this *had* been real, after all! See, now!—was not this water real, that he could run his fingers through it thus? And then he accepted as real, without protest, things all his reason would have been in revolt against, outside the realm of Sleep. All without seeking to know in what interval, under what circumstances, he had condemned the whole as unreality!

Soon that ghastly fetch of his mother—he knew this, somehow, beforehand—would limp towards him along the gravel pathway. Yes—quick upon his thought of it, it came, limping, limping, limping! This time he would have turned to fly from it, could he have chosen. But all power of movement was gone from him, and he could not speak. How he fought for speech, were it only a word!



Would this last for ever, with that muffled form still limping, limping towards him, yet never getting nearer? At last his voice came, but not to say what he would have it say; only to make a crazy noise he had no control over. From which intolerable horror of nightmare he woke with a great struggle, to find himself in the half-dark of a windless dawn, with an inexplicable idea upon him that this *is* the morning of the duel; and that, now that he knows, for some strange reason, what it will mean to him, he will not fight. He will draw back, honour or no!—nay more, he will awaken Lucinda to tell her how he has held back from the slaying of her father. For no perversion of intelligence is too amazing to be impossible to him who half-wakes from the delusions of a dream.

But, alas!—no voice came in response to his, and he was alone in the room. Then his head cleared, and he shrank from himself to think how furtively, that morning of the duel, he had risen from Lucinda's side, that she might sleep on in ignorance, and how he had stolen noiseless from the house.

No need for caution now! He flung the lattice wide to welcome the sweet morning air, and looked out over the land, veiled here and there with mist, islanding the elms in the levels beyond the park-land, like a sea. It will just have time to tell the early riser that Autumn is upon us before the sun catches it unawares, and sends it flying. Sir Oliver knew by the backward dawn that he was beforehand with the time, and he had no mind for delay. A long ride round would take him the farther from that ride he sought to forget, of three months since. And the sooner he was dressed and out of that room, with a sense of that accursed dream still hanging about it, the better!

He took John Rackham to task, unreasonably, for not being ready with his horse, near an hour before the time he had bespoken it. Rackham, in no mind to waste a word on that matter, or any other, waited till he stopped, and said, "You want un now, I take it? Is *that* right?" To which his master replied, still unreasonably: "Don't waste time in talking. Saddle up!" And then, to a symptom of inquiry from the groom: "Want you?—no! Stay you at home, this time." And then was aware he had implied something by his last two words, more than concerned his hearer. But he brushed his consciousness aside, to make way for "Is my lady's dog here?—the one you wot of—the one she would always ride with."

"The gazehound or the setter?"

"The gazehound—Diarmid."

"You can have which one you like, Master Oliver. You've only to name it. They're both on 'em here." But this was only to bring a tone of inquiry into the matter, with a suggestion that his master had spoken obscurely in this case, and was always difficult to understand. On the same lines, he said in reply to "I told you to turn the dog loose," from Sir Oliver as he was mounting to the saddle—"You never said *when*, Master Oliver. If he's loosed afore you're out of sight, that's enough, to my thinking, and a bit over."

Oliver mounted and rode away, saying no more about the dog. His last words were: "Say to them—Cecily and Anstiss—that my lady returns with me." So he shouted back to the groom. "Tell them to have all in readiness to receive her." And so rode away, and Diarmid the gazehound caught him up just beyond the wych-elm, and scoured in wide circles over the park-land; safely, for so

far no deer were in sight, and he was too high-bred a dog to molest sheep or cattle. But Oliver was glad to be compelled to skirt the park, following the outer roadway, to avoid the deer. For thereby there was the less seeming, or none, of a schemed avoidance of that road by the Mausoleum, which he must at least have seen had he gone that way. Now, he could and did persuade himself that no hysterical fancies, bred of a nightmare dream, could have stood in the way of his taking the shorter road, and saving himself half an hour's hard riding. It was the dog and the fallow deer.

But he was betimes to his purpose, having started early. He could see from the road over Lea Down, as he approached the Old Hall, that its inhabitants were stirring but little, if at all. A gardener, as he saw by the scythe over his shoulder, walked across the lawn, and the ring of his whetstone upon it was clear a few moments after in the still air as Oliver drew nearer to the house. He went cautiously, being in no haste to arrive until he had seen Vincent ride away, as Anstiss had said was his custom. There would be no danger of their meeting, for the Squire would never ride over Lea Down. He was certain to go towards the village, or some farm, lower down on the hillside.

Sir Oliver waited, turning over in his mind what he should do with his horse. He was a little perplexed, as he had either to leave the horse tethered and unguarded—for he could not ride it close to Lucinda's garden—or to find someone in whose charge it might remain till his return. He resolved to tether it, and take his chance; unless indeed some suitable guardian should come in sight shortly. . . .

Were not those sounds from beyond the Hall voices, and

the ring of hoofs on the cobblestone paving he remembered so well at the front gate of the Hall? That must be Vincent, going out through the arch from the paved court within. Yes—and then follows the sound of his horse's quickening pace along the drive.

Oliver's eyes were fixed on a window in the eastern gable, that caught the sun. He knew that window well; had watched it more than once as he was doing now, in the early summer dawns, when the silly girl his victim would make appointments to meet her betrayer, without her parent's knowledge, many a time. He could recall that last time, before she left her home for good, when a white handkerchief waved by a fool's white hand showed him the game was his—a preconcerted signal. That was "Miss Mauleverer's room" then. It was so, still, perhaps; but . . . However, he was always ready with a spurious belief, to shield his conscience, that but for a living wife all his behaviour to Lucinda would have been honourable. It had been an *arrière pensée*, certainly; but now that it had come, the way he made the most of it at every turn showed an awakening of conscience, surely? Let him have the advantage of the doubt, for what it is worth.

There!—was not that a shifting of the window-curtain of that room? Yes—and an opening outwards of the casement; Sir Oliver could not see by whom, but he had a hope, for his face must have changed hopefully. Else why should the hound, crouched at his feet and panting open-mouthed, watching constantly for a signal from his master to sanction some activity undefined—why should he pant on a sudden more quickly?—why should his eye gleam with a new impatience, almost too strenuous to be borne? Dogs have a way of knowledge unlike ours, and

it goes beyond the most we are ready to allow them. How came this Diarmid to know what his master's intent had been in bringing him thus with him, as he very surely did? For his self-restraint endured no longer than to glean, from the eye he watched so intently, that its owner had caught sight of what he too was on the watch for; and then he was off like a whirlwind, the nearest way to reach the garden. Oliver had just caught sight of Lucinda there. It was no straight road, for a great garden-wall, which even Diarmid could not leap, had to be taken into account; and though he could have swum the pond he chose the way by the bridge.

Sir Oliver was minded to whistle him back, mistrusting his too great zeal. But a dog-whistle tells tales, and he thought better of a first impulse. There was his horse, too, to claim his attention. If he could see no one to take charge of it he would have to leave it, perforce. Was there a soul in sight? Well—a boy, certainly! A boy is better than nothing. He beckoned to the lad, telling him to keep his eye on the horse, and he should have a penny. The boy nodded, and he left him sitting in the fern by the roadside, while the tethered horse cropped the short grass within reach. He then followed the short cut to the bridge the dog had taken, sometimes zigzagging through the gorse and bracken. He knew little—almost nothing—of what he meant to say to Lucinda.

Were the words spoken by her—as he believed—so soon after his confession, that night of the storm, sufficient to warrant his posing as a pardoned culprit? He could not answer “Yes” to his own question.

As to the girl herself, she was hard put to it to know whether what had passed in three months—no more!—was real, or all a dream. For her, the world had changed

with a rush, and had swept away her girlhood. That is, if she could safely assume the reality of it all. Otherwise—and a half-hope was hers in secret—she might still wake from this horror of a too long night to find her life intact, and her father's voice in place of the oppressive stillness of the silent mansion. Think of it!—how she would welcome back that grown-up babyhood with all its ignorance upon it. But then came a terrible obstacle to the dream-theory. How could she have brewed this nightmare—most of all the joys that made it hardest to bear,—out of the knowledge of life that babyhood supplied?

So she had gone on through the days, herself within herself; speaking little, but with no outward sign upon her of more suffering inwardly than one might in reason hope would die with time. So thought her brother Vincent; so thought her other brother, Roger Locke. Both were wrong, but the truth is that no young man understands women—even his own sisters. And he will not hearken to his mother, for he thinks that already he knows better than she. On which account Vincent and Roger could dwell happily on the thought that one day the Lucy of old would come back to them, and life this side of the grave be somewhat sweet again, for all its shadows, until the happy hour of death. But this only when one or other of them had slain her betrayer and her father's murderer. Let her love for him die, and the hour of requital would come yet.

The Lucinda that Oliver caught sight of in her garden afar, on this morning of his ride to the Old Hall, was no other than herself of yesterday—of every yesterday as far back as the hour of that deadly revelation of his guilt, of that last kiss she could not withhold from the un-



conscious lips of the man she had loved. For her, life ceased then and there, and left her merely the task of being; no more for her than mere existence, till her patience should be crowned with death. She walked in the knowledge of a yesterday like this, a foreknowledge of a morrow no other than this. Her eyes on the ground scarcely left the gravel path to see the pansies skirting the beds on either side; still less to look up to the hollyhock flowers chasing the young buds hard to the topmost stem; unheeding even of the year's last rosebud, to burst maybe too late, and live a stunted life in a chill wind, or shrivel on the stem.

So insensible was she to sight or sound that she walked the garden's length beside a companion whom she had not seen. But she started as a dog's tongue touched the hand that hung listlessly beside her, and crying out aloud: "Oh, Diarmid, Diarmid—darling dog—where *have* you come from?" knelt and bent down over him, caressing his soft fur and beautiful ears, letting him lick her face. And the first tears that had come freely from her eyes fell in response to the dumb affection of this old lover of hers, and were more ease than pain.

The great hound, well content to be caressed by his old mistress, whom he had missed, be sure!—for dogs forget neither love nor hate—pressed up close to her feet as she sat down on a stone seat, moss-grown, at the path-end; and so crouched, throwing back his head to meet her hand, darting out a long tongue when there came a chance to touch it. So they remained, the dog and the woman, silent in the stillness of the solitary garden.

Was that the footstep of old Bayle, the gardener? "Why ask, when it could be no other?" was Lucinda's thought. No idea crossed her mind that the dog's

presence meant his master's near at hand; until, as the step came nearer, he started up, and trotted away through the arch in the wall—the garden's only entrance, for it was a complete enclosure.

Then the knowledge came home to her mind that this could be no other than Oliver himself, and had there been another outlet to the garden she would have fled to avoid him. The dog ran back a moment later, ahead of the approaching footsteps, licked her hand, and again returned to meet them. For dogs will do this thing, when in doubt betwixt two friends, as though to make each alive to the other's presence. Nearer came the footsteps—nearer still! And Lucinda, who had started to her feet, stood motionless as a statue, pale as Death. And her words to her own heart as she stood there were: "He slew my father!"

The dog vibrated between them quicker as Oliver came slowly down the garden walk. More and more slowly, till barely three paces farther would have brought him to Lucinda's side. But her hands, outstretched towards him, would have forbidden his nearer approach, even had her face, hard set, relaxed its force of prohibition. Even had the cry not come from her lips, with all the power in them of the agony of her soul: "Go, Oliver, go! You are my father's murderer."

Then said Sir Oliver, as he had said before: "I am no murderer, Lucinda. Had it been given me to choose, is it like I would have slain him?" It was on his lips to say: "I thought I was absolved of that guilt." But his restless longing to plead his case had possession of him, and he let it slip. So Lucinda remained unconscious of this belief of his.

Her reply was quiet and short, under her breath almost.

"I cannot tell. Only, go! I cannot bear this." A dazed look was growing on her, as though the strain were overtaking her, and she might swoon clean away at any moment.

Then Oliver, knowing himself all the while a liar and hypocrite, framed in his mind a cunning defence, or rather counter-attack. "Oh, Lucy, think of this!" he cried. "Was it not all known to your father—had he not my pledge? Did he not know that you would hold me bound by it? Why did he need to force this meeting upon me? How could I hold back in honour? What choice had I but to answer his challenge?" He paused a moment, while she stood still and speechless; then resumed: "Oh, Lucy—dearest of all women!—only believe this one thing of me; that, when he and I crossed swords, my sole idea was to hold him in play—disarm him—end a bloodless encounter with a renewed pledge of fidelity to his daughter, until I could compass my own freedom from a bond I hated—yes, a bond that was forced upon a foolish boy by interested guardians. . . ."

"What is all this to me? You *did* kill him!"

Then Oliver told a deliberate lie. "Ay, Lucy!—but with a difference. My sword-thrust slew him, not my heart. It was the strength of his blade, seeking my life, that forced my hand, and made defence seem onset. . . . Oh, Lucy, think of me at my best! Mix but a little mercy with your blame! This is God's truth that I tell you."

Then again he was half in a mind to try if her memory kept no hold of that seeming pardon that he clung to despite misgivings of its reality. But before the words could come Lucinda of a sudden broke into a long, strained laugh, with an underthrill in it of such pain that

Oliver half thought her mad, for the moment. "God's truth!" she cried. "God's truth from *your* lips!" Hesitation came and ended with a sharp and searching question: "Where are my letters?"

Oliver flinched from the words. As he stood there with bitten lip, and eyes that would not meet hers, he said to himself: "The fool that I was not to see that she *must* come to know *that*." Not knowing *how* she knew, yet seeing many possibilities of knowledge for her, he stopped inquiry short. It was enough that she did know.

But how much? If her meaning was, "How came it these letters were never delivered?" what was there in *that* that postal miscarriage would not account for? But suppose she knew more! What could he say unless he knew her sources of information? And even their disclosure would have given him no defence. He had none, and knew it. But he might find some plea, given time. So he muttered, "All shall be explained," or words to the same effect. To her next curt question "How?" he could say nothing.

Then it seemed as though her indignation at his duplicity and fraud had, as it were, released her from her love of him—that love which was the true cause of her weakness against herself. Had it not been still surviving speech would have been easy to her. Now the lock seemed to fall from her tongue, and her anger to give her strength of utterance, as it burst through the bounds that held it. "Oh, you may well be silent, liar that you are—liar that you have been!" Her eyes flashed, and her words came fiercely. "No, Oliver, no! Speak not at all! Keep to the silence you cannot break without another lie. Listen to what you have done for me, and

then begone and let me see you no more. I have loved you, Oliver, and my love has been a true one, while yours has been the love that kills, and leaves its victim to the beast that feeds on carrion. I know now in my sad wisdom what my lot was to have been. You have slain my father. . . . Oh, my God, my dearest, my dearest!—dead—dead! . . . my dearest who had no choice, as men's thoughts bind them, but to cleanse the dishonor I had brought upon him in blood. And he died—my darling!—and there was I the while, never knowing. . . . No—listen still, Oliver, listen still! . . . I believe in my heart I must have loved you to the end, even though we had never met again, but for the wicked deceit you practised on me. I know it all now. I know now why I was taken away at an hour's notice to Kips Manor—to keep me in ignorance of his death. I know now your fraud with the letters I wrote him—all to keep me in ignorance of his death. I have seen all your device for duping me—the empty sheets that made the letter still seem my own, the seals you could let me place over them while you laughed at your dupe in your sleeve—all, all to keep me in ignorance of my father's death! . . . Oliver!—you have been a traitor to me, to the woman who loved you truly. Now, begone!”

“Lucinda, will you hear me speak? Will you think calmly? . . .”

“I am quite calm. You can say nothing to make your treachery less. Begone!”

“How can you know, except you listen to me?” Yet he would have found it so hard to lay claim to a previous pardon in the face of her vehemence, even had she been willing to hear, that he was secretly half glad of her unreason; and, indeed, relieved that she did not answer—



as she might well have done, for policy's sake—"Go on with your defence. It is your right."

But for her all thought of policy was at an end, all thought but how soonest to get safe parted from this object of her love and hate. For the reason she could not bear to be near him was less her hatred of him, real as it was, than the equally real love that smouldered in her heart. Could she but get away from him, her consciousness of it might kill her, but it could not burst out, branding her with disloyalty to her father's memory. How she would have welcomed some inconceivable palliation of her lover's guilt, that she might but once again feel his arms about her as of old. For no woman's love ever dies; and some few men in this are not unlike women.

As to what followed, things being thus. Whether it was that Sir Oliver, confident from wicked experience, acted on a belief that no woman could long steel her heart against his caresses, or that Lucinda's beauty, made resplendent by her flashing out at him in such anger, went beyond his powers of resistance, none can say. But this is certain, that such lame palliation of his conduct as he tried further to make ended in an outbreak of the truest passion, probably,—of the nobler sort, mark!—that he had ever felt in his life. And that it was under misapprehension of some concession on her part that he approached close to her. Indeed, she may have just wavered, at the old words of love, back again in the old place where she heard them first. But her indecision was of the slightest. For as, presuming on the encouragement it gave him, Sir Oliver sought to take her once more in his arms, she made no ado, but just struck him sharply in the face—no light blow, but a real one—and fled before



he could recover from his amazement, and in truth before his eyesight was fully his own again; for the blow had blinded him in good earnest, for such time at least as she needed to get out of his sight. When he saw clear again she was gone, and the dog Diarmid had followed her. Sir Oliver did not wait for his return.

## CHAPTER XVIII

VINCENT MAULEVERER, riding to the village, found reason to turn from his intention of visiting a farm a mile beyond it, hearing by chance that its tenant was away at his brother's, the miller's, lower down the river, which makes a curve at this point round Lea Down. It was a ten minutes' gallop at the most, but over a soft turf, tender to his horse's hoof, and welcome to its rider in the sweet air of the morning. Little after the moment when Oliver first recognised Lucinda in the distant garden, he had reached the mill; and then, after a short chat with his tenant, and a few words of greeting and gossip with the miller his brother, he turned towards home, this time making a short cut back across Lea Down. Five minutes of careful riding through scattered gorse and stony ground—a very warren of rabbit-burrows, tricky to the surest horse's foot—brought him to the clear track along the ridge of the Down, that Oliver had passed an hour since. No need to touch his horse's mouth here, to get his best service, for a loose rein on such a track brings joy alike to horse and rider.

But he reined in suddenly, at sight of something unwonted a little off the line of road—a saddled roan, browsing quietly in a coppice of stunted oak wind-swept to the shape of the hillside. What could bring a rider over Lea Down at this hour in the morning? If he was a neighbour, why had he not come to the Hall, where all were welcome, even in this saddened time? If he were a

stranger, the more need for hospitality. For that was the way in those days where passers-by in the countryside were scarce. At sight of this horse, Vincent was off his own in a moment, and speaking with a boy who seemed to be left in charge.

The boy was shy of talking with the Squire, and had to be coaxed; questioned, however, he communicated by nods and headshakes the main facts of his guardianship of the horse. The difficulty was to get from him any description of its owner.

"Come, Abs'lom, old man!" said Vincent, who knew the lad quite well as "Widow Price's little chap." "What do you say when you speak? You've got a tongue in your head, haven't you?" The boy nodded. "Very well, then, what's it for?"

Absalom—it was his real name—seemed to cast about in his mind for some answer that would go well with catechism, the form in which he accepted any inquiry from magnates, lay or clerical. He decided on, "For to say my prayers with," and seemed confident that his answer would be acceptable on grounds of piety.

"Good boy!" said Vincent; not laughing, for he saw nothing to laugh at. "For to say your prayers with, and to tell me who the gentleman was who gave you the horse to hold. That's it, isn't it? Did you know the gentleman?" He only asked the question to prolong the talk, and come gradually to the knowledge he was seeking. He had no expectation of an affirmative answer.

But Absalom Price gave one; in fact, he gave several. For he kept nodding to emphasize his first assent. Thereat Vincent, surprised, but not forgetting that conciliation and confidence are the surest roads to information from a shy youngster, pressed gently, and in time

discovered that the owner of the horse was "t' yoother Squire at t' Leasowes, by Croxley Village."

He left the boy to examine the horse, tethered a few paces back in the thicket, and it recognised him as he recognised it; for horses are shrewd enough to mark those who come about them. But apart from that, he could tell the saddle-bow, a notable piece of Spanish leather-work, as Oliver's, and the holster pistols. His eye brightened as he thought to himself how soon he might be face to face again with his father's murderer.

He walked a few paces back along the road to where he had left his own horse browsing; and, leading it into the thicket, tethered it out of sight in a little glade to a fallen tree-trunk. Its hoof struck the hollow tree, and a snake started out from a deep hole in its rugged boss, and streaked, a zigzag glitter, across the short grass. The boy, who had followed, ran on its track delighted with the chase, flinging stones, boy-like, at the reptile, which was too clever for him in the end, vanishing under prickly gorse. Then the Squire said to him: "You've got to mind your own horse, Absalom. What did the other Squire say he'd give you?"

"Give oy? A penny."

"You had best be a good boy, and earn your penny." But Absalom hung back inexplicably, as though he wanted to say something, but lacked the courage. Vincent, puzzled, added interrogatively: "Well?"

Then the boy found his voice. "I do'ant want 'ere a penny of his, in *my* poke," said he. . . . "Whoy not, master? I tell 'ee—because of th' owd Squire, up to Hall."

Absalom's silence did not seem to have been due to any lack of words on his part, but only to rustic shyness.

Vincent looked up sharply, awake to the oddity of his manner, as much as to the matter of his speech. "My father!" said he. "What on earth do we mean, I wonder?" He spoke half to himself; but added, aloud, to the boy: "Come here, my man, and tell me all about it."

The little fellow still hung back a bit, but presently gathered courage, coming close to Vincent, whom he seemed to have decided not to fear, but to trust. He had a tale to tell, and told it beneath his breath, fragmentarily, and with occasional help from his hearer, but very intelligently for a lad of his years, which were eleven or twelve at most. It would be difficult of narration in his exact words and accent, and would detain the story to no purpose, for it was a tale the reader knows well. He was, in fact, the boy spoken of as witnessing from a concealment the duel that ended in the death of the old Squire. He had, it seemed, locked up his secret knowledge of the dreadful tale in his own heart; indeed, had it come out, he would certainly, young as he was, have been called on to add his testimony to that of the other bystanders, the slain man's second and the surgeon. But he was a silent and reserved child, and kept his peace where many another boy of his years would have paraded his experience, and shown it as a feather in his cap, and for the diversion of his playfellows.

When he had come to the end of his tale, Vincent said: "Where was it, then, the sword-point touched the old Squire . . . ay, the first time of all?" He spoke as one putting a great control upon himself, but always with affectionate encouragement for his young informant, who was now half-sitting on his knee, as he himself sat on the fallen tree-trunk. The child's face burned, and his eyes

glowed. He seemed to imagine that his word was questioned. "A *saw* it," said he emphatically. And then, when Vincent asked again where was this wound, he pulled aside his small jerkin and touched his body, well below the ribs, saying: "Round by here, and a putten t' hand to un, th' owd Squire." Then Vincent, who felt sick as his mind saw the whole thing, as it were, pass before his eyes, understood well how it was that this event of the first wound had so nearly escaped the notice of the seconds, who were on the right of the wounded man, on the side opposite to the bush where the boy was hidden. The other witnesses had suggested such an accident, but had not held to their testimony. The brief and simple tale of the boy carried conviction.

Vincent, then, feeling as though the fierce anger he could not check might easily drive him mad, kept outwardly calm no longer than to tell the boy he might go back to his watching of the horse. But he was to come again soon, if he saw the Squire of Croxley on his way to claim it. The boy readily promised to do this, and ran—maybe glad to have the answering of no more questions.

Left to himself, Vincent had need of all the strength of his soul, there alone, with the knowledge on him of the manner of his father's death! What could he do but pray that the man who slew him, whose horse stood saddled and tethered but a stone's throw distant awaiting him, might soon return to claim it? And yet—if he did! All the joy would go out of retribution for a father's murder, if it involved a sister's desolation. How could he send the traitor to his last account of guilt until he knew for a certainty that Lucinda's love for him was dead.

Presently came the boy, running back. Vincent leapt to his feet. "Is he here?" cried he. "Is he coming?"



“Noa, bean’t! But a can see un! . . . Wheer? In t’ lady’s garden, nigh t’ lady! You may see they, too, as well as oy. Coom!” Vincent followed him. A few paces beyond where Oliver had left his horse, the thicket opened out, showing a clear view of the Old Hall, with Lucinda’s rose-garden in the foreground, near enough to show what was not hidden by the walls. “Theer they be, master—the tway on ’em,” said the boy triumphantly.

It was just at the moment of Oliver’s last appeal to Lucinda that Vincent first saw them clearly. Even at that distance any spectator might have judged that the man was pressing earnestly some suit upon the woman, and that she was repelling him, holding his importunity in check. This went on for a few moments, her aversion or resentment seeming to increase as, always coming nearer, he forced his advances upon her, and would in the end have clasped her in his arms. Only for those few moments had Vincent the question hanging in his mind, “Will she—can she—forgive him?” Only until the sound of her sudden cry of anger reached him through all that intervening distance, and he saw, as Oliver’s blood-stained hands touched her, the way in which her own struck fiercely out as in abhorrence of the thing they sought to drive away. Then, indeed, Vincent’s heart leapt within him for joy, for there was no love left in a blow like that.

He watched Lucinda’s flight from the garden, saw her emerge on the straight terrace-path to the house; and then noted for the first time that she was followed by a great white hound he did not recognise, and that she stopped at the entrance from the lawn to caress it lovingly, stooping over it and kissing its face. It was no dog he knew. Then

he saw Oliver turn to come away, more feeling than seeing his disconcertment and chagrin, and then lost him in scattered coppices and buildings, till he came again in sight of the bridge.

“Now, Abs'lom Price, listen to me, and when the gentleman comes for his horse, say to him just what I say to you now.” Abs'lom nodded his pledge of faith, and his confidence in his own powers. “Remember to say that the old Squire's son waits to see him, and bring him round to me, there where the snake was . . . yes—the viper!” Vincent repeated the word, mimicking the boy's pronunciation.

Absalom turned to go, eager to do his errand. But Vincent called him back, to give him another charge; harder, perhaps, of fulfilment for a mere youngster. Did he know where the barber lived in the village—he that tended the old Squire's wound? For the village surgeon was the barber too. Of course Abs'lom knew! Well, then, he was to find him in all haste so soon as he had brought Sir Oliver to the spot, and tell him to come forthwith, for his services would be needed. He was to wait for no further telling, but to go. Vincent saw that he understood, and sent him packing. Then he retraced his steps and waited.

His patience would be taxed, he knew, in the pause that must elapse before Oliver's coming. But he would bear it. What did a few minutes more matter now—now that he was franked by what he had seen of the change of his sister's heart—freed by her action to take vengeance on the man that had slain their father? So, patience!

What were the words that kept coming to his mind, the Divine bidding to love our enemies, to forgive that we should be forgiven? “Mine enemies—yes!” said Vin-

cent to his heart. "Mine enemies that face my sword in the light of day! Yea—the better they wield the sword, the better I love them!" And the tears coursed down his cheeks as the thought came to him of his dear foe, Vanhelst, unburied in some forgotten corner of rocks jutting out to sea, his face and limbs all mangled by the fishes. But—the man whose treacherous love had betrayed his sister, whose more than treacherous sword had slain his father! It was not enemies such as he that our Lord thought to name in that Sermon on the Mount, when He spake as one having authority, and not as one of the Scribes. Would not He Himself rather have spoken His blessing on the sword of retribution for the sin He Himself denounced? For was not the Commandment spoken, "Thou shalt do no murder"? and had not He Himself said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled"?

The laggard time seemed longer than its true duration; no doubt of that! He paced restlessly to and fro awhile; then stopped, and, drawing his sword from its scabbard—for in those days no man was parted from his sword except it were by his own fireside, or that of a friend—struck the air with it so that it sang. Then he paused, with a doubt in his mind. The sword was a long one—something over the standard length—and might be a cause to delay the encounter. The soldier's right to a weapon in battle as large as his strength can wield it is subject to a new rule of chivalry in the duello. There the weapons must be alike, weight for weight, inch for inch. The apprehension was a damper to Vincent's glowing hope of battle near at hand. But there came the sound of voices, a boy's and a man's—yes!—Oliver's voice. Vincent sheathed his sword, and waited.

“That need be no drawback, no more than that we are alone.” So said Oliver, five minutes later, as they faced each other on the turf, free of superfluous garments and all in trim but that, when their swords were held to measure, the point of Oliver’s came short of the hilt of Vincent’s. For it is thus the length of swords must be tried when duellists are alone; neither parting with his weapon. A second of either may handle both weapons at once, for a measurement.

“It is too great a miss, Sir Oliver. It shall never be said I slew a man with a sword longer than his own, off the field of battle. I can accept no grace, neither, from my father’s murderer. At the least, take you the longer weapon.” He proffered it, handle foremost, but the response to his action was but sluggish.

Sir Oliver’s longing for the encounter was not keen, and it may have been that he would have welcomed any delay. Now he knew quite well, for all his show of indifference, that Vincent would never fight him at an advantage, and may easily have seen that the surest road to a respite lay through a mock-chivalrous refusal of his opponent’s concession. By holding back he foresaw that Vincent might be, as it were, compelled to withdraw his challenge, and that he himself might even be able to refuse a later one, saying, “It is by no fault of mine, but your own, that the affair miscarried. Was not I ready? What cared I for the eighth of an inch on a sword-point?”

But a middle course was open to him. He held out the handle of his own sword, taking no hold of his opponent’s in exchange, only saying, “A fairer shift would be to cast lots?” For he meant, if the lot gave Vincent back his own blade, to accept the proposal that was sure to come, of an adjournment till all the for-

malities could be complied with. So sure was he of his man.

Vincent assented to the suggestion. A large and a small pebble in either hand, and Oliver's closed right as he opened it showed the smaller pebble. That settled it, and Vincent, joyously seizing Oliver's sword, exclaimed: "The time has come. Look to yourself, Sir Oliver Raydon!"

Sir Oliver was a fine swordsman, as the tale has seen; but his memory of that encounter he had witnessed from afar, on the ship's deck, unnerved him. In vain did he repeat to himself that the vigorous use of a broadsword—a ship's cutlass—in a *mêlée*, a tangle of combatants, argued nothing of a skill to match his own in mastery of the rapier-point. He was soon painfully aware that he had to contend against a strength greater than his own, however he had dared to hope that the finesse and subtlety of his own hand, acquired from great masters of *la scherma* in Italy, were absent from his opponent's. He was aware, too, that his position was that one least loved of all combatants, ineffectual attack on strength in reserve, ignorant as yet what power may lie behind it. Do what he could, he could not pass that terrible steel point that was always between him and his object, that seemed immovable, as though held by a vice. He was conscious of continually falling back before the relentless, impassable blade, never regaining his lost ground; conscious, too, that he would soon be stopped by a tree at his back, putting him at a disadvantage; for the more reliance is placed on rapidity and subtlety as against strength, the greater the need for entire freedom of action. The doubt how soon his limit would be reached was as bad as the reaching of it.

The treacherous minutes fled, each one in turn leaving



him more keenly alive to his own loss of force, with no set-off of gain to balance it. Still the same determination, fixed, unwavering, in the stern eyes he had to watch, as well as the sword-point that had begun, to him, to mean—death! And not far hence, if this went on!

But, at least, his adversary should not go scot-free, whether he himself lived or died. In his despair, a most brilliant rally spoke well for Oliver's repute as a swordsman. Had he been met by a like handling of his opponent's weapon, he might have scored a success, but he had no chance against a point he could neither displace nor pass, and his breath was going quickly. The end had to come, and came. A recoil from his last futile thrust—it had gone dangerously near success!—a half-stumble over a stone on his backward path, and a wavering seen plainly by the stern eye always fixed upon him, and then he felt his own sword-hilt caught irresistibly, and saw it whirled away above his head, to turn and fall hilt-foremost into the tree-trunk where the tethered horse still munched the grass peacefully, all unknowing what had been the meaning of the measured sword-clink, the ring of gliding steel, so near at hand. Something of the spirit of the time and its traditions from the past stirred in Oliver as he stood there, believing he awaited death. "The hour is yours, Vincent Mauleverer," said he. "Make a brief end!"

At that moment he seemed his best as a man to his opponent; better even than he had seemed before as the genial host, the courteous gentleman who had given such generous welcome to a castaway. And thereat Vincent could think a word of forgiveness to himself for the loving of this man for awhile by the sister whose repudiation of him he had but now witnessed. For the fearlessness of death is a thing that softens even the hangman's heart,



though his knot be tightening on the throat of God's very foulest creature.

The boy, who had done his errand quickly—indeed, by a favourable chance he had met the surgeon before he reached the village—ran well ahead of his company; for more than one chance bystander was at hand to follow them—if only in quest of excitement. He ran his best as, coming nearer, he heard the cruel music of the sword-play through the copsewood ere he reached it. But the sound had stopped when, still hidden, he could see the combatants, the one standing at pause, his sword-point dropped; keen eyesight for his late opponent only, clenched jaw and knitted brow that surely meant death; the other with an almost mocking ease in his folded arms, almost a smile in the defiant curl of his lip, as he repeated in the boy's hearing, “Make a brief end on't, good Vincent! You will not change the past, but . . .” and then some more his hearer could not catch.

The boy's heart thumped on his ribs, as, understanding much for all his youth, he looked out from the bushes, and saw where Oliver Raydon stood defenceless before the man whose father he had slain, whose sister's young life he had blighted past recall.

## CHAPTER XIX

Nothing is, nor can be, more wearisome to the heart than the intrusion of the little vulgar things of daily life, when thought and feeling are at their highest tension, at moments when of all things our longing is but to get away, to be alone; to struggle, as may be, against remorse or grief, or apprehension of some dreaded news to come. Such was Lucinda's case, when, seeking no more than a brief solitude, if only to be clear of tell-tale tears, she encountered by the way a person who had never been overwelcome to her at the best of times. At the stairfoot that led to that room in the eastern turret she had so lately come from, her anticipation of relief in its silence was balked by the sudden appearance of Rachel Anstiss, a very epitome of all decorous obeisances, her manner a living testimony to her willingness to overlook a fellow-woman's frailty in her own interest. "Rely upon me to know nothing," was written on her untempting cheek, and confirmed by an indescribable subservience in a projection of upper teeth that quarrelled with her lower lip about a lisp they should have shared between them.

My lady would pardon her importunity, she knew—this was the substance of her exordium—seeing how honest was the affection for her ladyship that prompted it. Lucinda mistrusted this woman, and knew her for a liar. But she was too gracious of heart to refuse to hear her suit outright. What did she seek?—she asked.

"What should I seek, my lady," said Rachel Anstiss,

"but to serve you, when you return to your home. The worshipful Sir Oliver . . ." The woman stopped, not because of any interruption, but because, until now, she had not noticed her hearer's quick-coming breath and ashy-white face. "I will speak to you of this later," Lucinda said, and passed quickly up the stair. Mrs. Anstiss could think of nothing to say, only, as she turned to go, she closed her lips tight, and nodded more than once. She may only have done this to lay claim to insight, however vague was her idea of the cause of Lucinda's distress of mind.

The great white hound had followed Lucinda from the garden, but stopped at the stairfoot. He knew he was an intruder in the house, but that the sin of mere entry was venial, while the ascent of stairs was a thing forbidden to dogs of his size, whatever might be the privileges of lesser pets. So he stood at the foot, one forepaw touching the lowest tread at times, with soft explanatory noises now and then, pleading for a suspension on his behalf of a stupid rule. But his appeal was made to one who had no soul for dogs, and the courtesy of his nobler nature made concession to Rachel Anstiss, whose threatening action in driving him out was indeed but a registration of her claim to belong to the ruling caste, Man. For had he ignored it, what could she have done? He trotted out, the way he came, never questioning her jurisdiction. As for Rachel herself, she hesitated, with brief nods; then returned to the kitchen. She said to herself more than once by the way that it was no concern of hers, and made that fact a stepping-stone to the telling of this experience to such others of the household as she found there. And these were ready with speculation as to its meaning, and each could account for her ladyship's demeanour in her own

way, and to her own satisfaction. But no one of them knew of Sir Oliver's presence in the garden, an hour since. For this garden was quite unseen from the windows of the house.

An hour passed, or little short of an hour. Then Lucinda, who had remained alone in her room with a swimming head that would not let her think what had happened, rose from the seat she had fallen into and never stirred from, as the little Swiss clock on the mantel struck ten, telling her how the minutes had run by uncounted. Surely Vincent should have returned from his ride by now. He had been gone the best part of two hours.

She roused herself, and after slight adjustment of her hair and dress, went down the stairway of the tower, and into a long corridor she had to pass to reach the broad flight leading to the entrance-hall. As she passed an open window she caught the sound of much discussion in the kitchen. It had continued without material variation since Rachel Anstiss set it afoot an hour since; every soul, except the little kitchen-wench Nell, whose business was to be seen and not heard, having repeated the same verdict at intervals throughout that time, without contributing any new datum to the discussion. They might have gone on thus for another hour, had not a sudden cry from the corridor reached them, and brought them out to find its cause.

For Lucinda, when she reached the corridor, saw an unexpected sight. At the far end was the great dog Diarmid standing true in the centre of the passage-way, his tail beating from side to side, a slow expressive pendulum; otherwise, a statue. But as the Memnon of the Desert gives out—so travellers say—a note at sunrise, so Diarmid, when he saw his mistress, uttered a little musical

sound of admonition or welcome; then made a half-turn back, as though to lead the way to something known to him, but outside his powers of speech. Again turning, he came to Lucinda's feet, crouching and doing his best to tell of this thing, whatever it might be.

Then Lucinda, stopping to caress him, and on the edge of a flood of tears—and little wonder, so near to the sweet nature of the dog!—was stopped by her own sudden cry, that came from her in despite of herself. For there on the green veining of the marble floor, where he had dragged himself, crouching, to meet her caress, was a new streak that had no kinship with the marble, for it was red as blood.

Had it not been for all the tension of the morning, she would have been more mistress of herself than to cry out thus for a thing which might have many explanations. It might even have been the dog's own blood. A scratch beneath him as he leaped a fence would have accounted for it. But Lucinda's cry was one of relief as well as alarm, for she had, as it were, a right to cry out for such a cause. And it was heard in the kitchen, for all their clack, as we have seen. All came running out.

“Why is it blood? What blood?—whose blood?” Thus Lucinda, speaking quickly through a growing apprehension. She was ashy white, and her breath caught.

Then the three serving-women and Zachary Sharp the butler, and Anthony the stable-help, who had no business in the kitchen—for the girl Nell was, as Cook said, no business of his—all looked about, and each at the other. But none found words except Mrs. Langdon, the house-keeper. “Sakes alive and save us, Miss Lucy!” said she. “There be no blood that I can see. ’Tis in your eyesight.”

But Rachel Anstiss saw better, and found Dame Lang-

don to blame; for that was her way. "You need not be so ready to correct my lady," said she. "See the dog's coat." And then Lucinda pointed to the floor-stain. But none could have a guess of what the blood was. Zachary the butler shook his head as though he could tell something; but no one heeded this, none thinking him a bit wiser than his neighbours. Lucinda alone had any motive for suspecting bloodshed near at hand.

Presently she said, "He is my dog Diarmid from the New Hall. Take him and wash him." And Zachary the butler said "Anthony!" to the stable-help, as one qualified to convey instruction from above, and make the will of his betters known to those of humbler station. Thereon Anthony said, as though his authority had been appealed to: "Ah, that's what he is, he's Diarmid. Over by Croxley." And the dog went with him, having first looked round at Lucinda, to make sure it was her will that he should do so.

She had known that the little Swiss clock in her room was a runagate well ahead of the true time. But now the tall clock in the hall testified, with slow decision, to the outrageous lateness of the hour. And still no Vincent! But she said nothing to any of the household of the uneasiness that was on her. Only, she could not remain in the house, but had perforce to go to the main entrance, from which she could see the road either way, whether he returned the way he went or not. For even if he had gone round by Lea Down he would ride in at this front gate. Of this she felt sure, and watched for his return with confidence.

So absorbed was she in her watching, and so eager to catch sight of him at the very soonest, that she gave no heed to certain noises in the house behind her, betokening



that something was afoot. Even when old Adam Anstiss, the gatekeeper, said to her, "I think they be calling for you in the house, Miss Lucy"—for he, too, had passed a lifetime at the Old Hall, and would speak of her thus—even then she did not withdraw her eyes from the road.

But soon comes the little kitchen-wench, or scullion, Nell, running and crying; and to what she has to say Lucinda must needs listen. It is all mixed with sobs, and inarticulate with terror. The Squire has come back—that much is clear. But, if he has come back, a-horseback, and has given his horse to Anthony to bring round, who is this the little maid speaks of whom "they are carrying up to the red room"; that is, the room her father breathed his last in. Speed back to the house comes in the way of a clear hearing; yet it would be ill economy to halt and make it clearer. A few steps more will give the facts themselves. A frightening prevision hangs in Lucinda's mind for a moment. Has Vincent kept his saddle despite of some bad injury, just able to reach home and fall insensible? In another moment she has rejected the idea.

It is scarcely a minute from the Lodge gate to the entrance-hall of the house, even though one has to cross the courtyard. But it seems an age to Lucinda, as she almost runs, trying by the way to make sense of the child's half-articulate report. Then one of the others comes running to meet her, having first sought her elsewhere; but on seeing her stops, and calls back through the door to someone within, "Here comes my lady." Thereon her fear for her brother is at an end, for he meets her at the door, and his arm is strong to support her, and welcome.

For she is sick with an apprehension she dares not utter.

Yet it is something, and no small thing neither, to see Vincent's face so grave and strong, and to feel the strength of his arm about her waist. What is that he says? She repeats after him, as not understanding his words, "He may live! How 'may live'?"

He alters the phrase. "It may be that he will live."

She knows in her heart of whom he speaks. But, suppose her knowledge is wrong! "Oh, Vincent," she cries out, "of whom do you speak? Say his name, for God's sake!"

"Oliver—Sir Oliver Raydon."

Then she cried out aloud: "Oh, Vincent, you have slain him!" And she thrust her brother from her, and would have fled, though she knew not where. But her strength stood her poorly in stead, and down she fell, not swooning outright, but all dizzy and insecure of foot. He, for his part, stood by her but for a moment, pityingly; then raised her in his arms as he might have raised a child, she moaning the while, half-unconscious, perhaps, and carried her to a room where there was a couch to place her, and knelt beside her, keeping her hand tenderly in his, and smoothing back from her brow the great mass of black hair her fall had shaken over it. And then he found his voice to speak to her returning consciousness.

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy! It was not my hand, as the chance was, but the hand of God—if indeed he be slain. But that I know not. He lives still, and has spoken. . . ."

Her mind seemed to come back to her, but she spoke without unclosing her eyes, or rising up.

"Where is he?" she said. "Where is he now?"

"He is in the room where our father died," said Vin-

cent, but in a hushed voice. "We had no choice but to place him there. I had told them to carry him to Roger's room or mine, high up. But as he was borne by the red room the blood came again, that was stayed for a time; and the surgeon would have us place him on the nearest bed, so that he should be spared further jolting on the stairs. . . ."

Lucinda started up—became, as it were, herself again, but as one in panic. "Oh, let me go to him!" she cried. "I *must* go. He *is* Oliver. Oh, how can I be so near him when he dies! . . . and yet . . . no!—I cannot go." And with that she sank back on the couch, sitting on in a kind of despair, with little spasms now and again of the clenched hands.

Then she repeated, "No—I cannot go," as though her mind were made up. But she would be sure that the best was being done that might be for Sir Oliver, and made inquiry. Oh yes—so said Vincent—the surgeon was with him, and he himself would return shortly to the bedside of the wounded man. Nothing should be neglected. But, said Lucinda, would it not be well that Anthony should ride to Caistorbury to summon Dr. Phinehas, who was of wider experience than little Cradock from the village, who was but an apothecary and the village barber. "That was a good thought," said Vincent. "I will arrange these matters," he added, and left the room.

He was not long absent, and found when he returned that Lucinda still sat as he had left her, to all seeming never having moved from her place. "Now I will tell you," said he, and went on to describe his meeting with Oliver, and all the events we already know. What has not been told he narrated thus: "When I saw him standing there before me, and thought of our father lying dead,

and all his villainy to you—ay! and to a hundred others—I was hard put to it, my Lucy, not to send my sword-point on a good errand of justice through his wicked heart. But he was disarmed and defenceless, and I had little liking for a task that was fitter for a hangman or headsman in a land where none but traitors are condemned. So—to cut the tale short—I bade him take his sword again in hand, for that I would not grudge him a man's death fighting, though no such grace was due to him from me or mine. Brute as he was, he had his courtesies, for he acknowledged it. 'I am your debtor,' said he, 'for a grace I have not deserved.' But I thought even then he spoke with an ill-command of tongue. . . ."

Lucinda interrupted. "How 'even then'?"

"Wait, and you shall hear. It is quickest told just as it chanced. He went to take his sword from where it had fallen—as I told you. . . ."

"Yes, I heard it. It had fallen in the hole of a tree-trunk. I know the place well, and the tree-trunk. Amy and I would place letters there, each for the other to seek and find . . . in the old days. . . ."

"Well!—the sword went hilt-foremost in, and the point was left without, six inches of it at the most. I saw it blaze in the sun as he stooped over it, reaching into the hollow tree—let me tell all that you may know—and then I heard the cry he gave, a bellowing as of some wild beast. . . ."

Lucinda cried out aloud, "Oh, Heaven!—then it was *that*?" And then Vincent felt the hand that he held clutch his with all its strength as her voice forced out the words, "Go on. I know it now." He went on steadily. "It was the cry he gave before—that day at Kips Manor.

I heard it come from him as he pitched headlong, fairly on the sword-point. Had I been close I could have saved him, I believe. . . .”

“Oh, Vincent—my brother! *Saved* him—saved him to slay him after! Oh, but you are mad!”

“I cannot clip reasons close upon it, darling. I *should* have tried to save him; that I know, without knowing why. But his doom came too quick for me. . . . And yet, he may live. . . .”

“Go on—go on where you stopped—Oliver fell!”

“He fell, and the fit was on him, and he lay foaming at the mouth. But he slipped from the sword-point, falling thus, sideways.” Vincent showed his meaning by a movement of his hand. “Nevertheless, he was sorely wounded; to instant death, as I thought then, for the blood came quickly. But they came up in time . . . did I tell thee of how I despatched the boy to get the doctor, even before we measured swords? . . . No? . . . Well, I am but a poor storyteller! . . . Anyhow, that was so, and he came up before the fit subsided, with others from the village. And the fit was not long; indeed, shorter by a great deal than at Kips Manor. Little Cradock would have it—and he has more wits than you grant him, Lucy—that it was the blood-letting that did it. But I know not.”

“But what could he do for him? . . . Oh, Oliver!” The pain in her heart came out in her cry; for what Sir Oliver had once been to her, that he must needs be still, in a certain sense, whatever his image had become. She was wrested two ways at once by a double-seeming of his memory.

“What could he do?” said Vincent. “He could check the hæmorrhage, and he did it, and cleverly, too. But

it was none too soon, and for my part I thought Sir Oliver might die by the way, for the litter he was borne upon was a rough contrivance at the best."

"Go to him now, Vincent—go and come back, and tell me, will he live or die? . . . No! dearest boy—I will *not* come. . . . No, I will never see him again. Never again! . . . But go you, now." Lucinda was not speaking as under any great stress of excitement, but as one whose mind was made up. Her brother made no effort to change her decision.

As he left the room, she caught, through the door, as it opened for the moment, the disturbance of the household; the sense of hurried footsteps and quick speech in undertones, till, closing again, it left her in silence as before. She could persuade herself that, whatever happened without, she would do well to take no part in it. Yet it was hard to hold to this resolve, an easy one enough to keep had she been sure her lover was not wounded absolutely to death. She could have borne her renunciation of him well enough had she not feared it might be made irrevocable to her. Her inner soul was shuddering at a dire possibility in the beyond; a fierce remorse waiting to spring on her heart from the darkness—a knowledge that her own hard will alone had stood between herself and Oliver at the last moment. How should she face the extenuation of his offences men would surely make for him when he lay dead, let alone the fact that exculpation, wellgrounded, might come to light? It is hard work to hate the dead, even those for whom, when living, we had little love. Oh that she too might die!—that was Lucinda's thought.

But was her life her own, that she should dare to wish it ended? She had asked herself this question more than



once of late. It was a question few women would have dared to say *yes* to, under Lucinda's circumstances.

Presently the loneliness that had been a relief a moment ago became an oppression; and, somehow, alleviation must be found. Walking restlessly about the room was of no use. She went with sudden hasty energy to the door, and, opening it, listened. No one was close at hand. A long way off she could hear the voices of her old aunts—but lately risen, no doubt—breaking in on the house keeper's, whose continuous current of speech was surely narrative that shocked and terrified. Nearer voices were in the kitchen, each trying to bear down the other with some sort of refutation. Her brother, the butler, and Cradock the surgeon would all be in the wounded man's chamber—the room she in her childhood would watch to see her father come from, in the early mornings, to kiss her on the stairs, and go out with her in her own garden, where she saw Oliver for the last time an hour since. What had become of the dog? His love was so true and sound, as far as it went, that she would have been glad to have him back. So she called "Diarmid—Diarmid!" He would be somewhere about, and would now be washed clean of blood. She shuddered as she thought that this was Oliver's blood.

But the dog came not, only the little kitchen-maid Nell, asking, did my lady call? Yes, she did. Where was the dog—the great dog? He had followed Mr. Anthony, who had ridden to Caistorbury to bring with him the other surgeon—the funny gentleman who was so deaf. The girl knew all about it; Mr. Anthony had told her. Was Rachel Anstiss gone?—Lucinda asked. Nell would see. She thought not.

Her thought was right; for here comes Rachel, not

content to ask if my lady had sent for her, without some quite needless suggestion of presumption on the part of the kitchenmaid, but all obsequious of her own part.

It then appears, in answer to inquiry, that she has come lately from the New Hall, having just arrived when Lucinda spoke with her at the stairfoot. She seems to consider herself provisionally Lucinda's maid, awaiting confirmation of the appointment, but in the interim favoured or tolerated by Dame Cecily, the housekeeper at Croxley. This morning, finding that Sir Oliver had ridden away early, telling John Rackham whither he went, she has thought the occasion good to further her own reinstatement; all the more readily that—being officious—she could convey with her a letter brought in haste by a special carrier for Sir Oliver but a few minutes after his departure.

“Give it to me!” says then Lucinda abruptly. “Why could not the messenger ride on here with it himself?”

“His nag was forspent, my lady. He had ridden hard through the night, he said; and his orders were to carry this letter, being of a great importance, to Sir Oliver Raydon, at Croxley Thorpe, or to give it into safe hands at his house, but no further instructions. 'Twas Mr. Rackham's idea, and none of mine, that I should carry it, saying he had no mind to saddle up his own horse that Sir Oliver should get a letter an hour sooner. So I took upon me to bring it, riding behind Dickon Weaver, who was taking cloth to market. I had no thought to presume.”

“Give it to me,” says Lucinda then again, and takes it from the woman's hand, saying no more, and letting her think as she will about the presumption.

But Rachel is concerned about this letter. “Will you,

my lady, be pleased to read what is wrote upon the cover?" Whereon Lucinda, who has had it in her mind to let the letter bide till she has disposed of Mrs. Anstiss, glances again at it, more closely, and reads, plain to be seen, thus:—"He who opens this letter had best have a care to sprinkle it with vinegar, and not to handle it more than is needed for a fair reading." Whereupon she, noting also that this letter has three great black seals, and feeling within her a shrinking from it as from some new and strange danger, goes first to place it well out of reach at the farthest end of the room, and then, returning, says curtly to Rachel Anstiss that if, as she supposes, her object in seeking her is to renew her situation of tirewoman, the sooner she gives up the idea the better; and that in no case will she herself ever return to Croxley Hall, whether Sir Oliver lives or dies. All this she says as though each word gave pain, and as one keen to make a finish; ending with, "You know your way out, Rachel Anstiss." Who, being thus dismissed, makes courtesy and departs.

When Lucinda took that letter in her hand she had, like enough, little idea of what the black seals meant, except that they could only portend Death. But the reading of the superscription gave her a chill. Of late terrible tales had been coming thick and fast of the frightful epidemic from the East, showing London as a plague-struck city, where no man's life was safe for an hour. Tales of whole households blasted with the irresistible contagion; parents flying from children in terror and leaving them to die; the mother shuddering away from the sucking babe at sight of the deadly plague-spot on its little body; the bridegroom sickening at the touch of the bride's lips, unconscious of the fatal taint still hidden by the bridal robes. Tales of

the doors of houses closed and sealed on a household forbidden egress, for all but that one death had been known within; all those who still were uninfected, or clung to hope, striving to escape by roof or window, but driven back; yes—even of one who, falling with a crash from an upper story, was thrust again, a broken cripple, into the charnel-house that once had been his home. Of the death-carts whose load was not always of the dead alone, for the dying were flung in the plague-pits; and men went mad who heard their cries, and had been known to cast themselves in of their own choice, soon to be hidden by the new loads, coming fast from all quarters. And these hideous tales, be sure, had lost nothing in the telling. So that Lucinda's mind was quickly alive to the meaning of those words on the envelope, and might, indeed, have augured ill from any letter having such funereal signs upon it, coming as it did from a city that seemed singled out above all others for the vengeance of God. But her mind dwelt on a false aspect of this scourge that had fallen on London, always conceiving that the meaner sort of folk alone fell victims, persons of condition being held secure by some strange preference of Fortune she accepted without questioning or seeking to find the cause of.

But she would have no one touch the letter but herself, and made sure that it was well sprinkled with vinegar, as the bidding was of the words on its cover. And then she locked it away in a private drawer until Sir Oliver should be well enough to read it himself, as might be ere long. For the letter was his, and none other had a right to it, and though he had been basely disloyal to her, she was not the one to pay him in his own coin. But she never entered the room where he lay betwixt life and death. And yet

she could not bring herself to listen to her brother's counsel, and leave the house to find a home for a time elsewhere, as she might have done. For there were a many who loved her so well as to be willing to give her a welcome, despite all her misdeeds, although they might not altogether account her sinless.

## CHAPTER XX

DURING the first day or two following his combined injuries—the stab and the fit together—Sir Oliver's tongue wandered, and his words were silly, or seemed so. And then two days later comes Vincent from his morning ride, and, meeting Lucinda at the outer gate, where she awaited his return, says to her: "We may look to be quit of him soon, Lucy. Speech has come back to him, and his wits."

Then Lucinda, who, despite herself, has been ever on the alert to hear all her brother can tell of the wounded man's progress, strives to conceal her eagerness to hear more, and does it but ill. Vincent sees this, and is ready with his report, and as he speaks is conscious of the growing interest all feel who watch the struggle between life and death, irrespective of the sufferer's claim to be loved or hated.

"He spoke well and clearly when I went to his bedside an hour since. 'I would not have you think me a hypocrite,' said he, 'and I am in no humour for a sinner's repentance; but I would not grudge amends for the wrong I have done, even for the sake of such as have been the worse by it. To be short with you,' says he, 'I have little stomach for the parson and his preaching, but I have as little to die and leave my memory a cursing-stock for Lucy.' And then he was still, as though he had used all the breath he had, and lay silent." Thus Vincent, to whom Lucinda made no immediate reply; so after a pause



he continued: "If I had any true guess of his meaning, it was that his mind ran on a wish he could make you his wife, legal as well as actual."

Then Lucinda said coldly: "I am his wife in no sense; and were it possible I should become so, is he not our father's murderer? How could I wed him?" Now she said this never imagining what news was contained in that letter that awaited Oliver's fitness to read it. For it was still lying where she had placed it, by the peremptory advice of Dr. Phinehas, who would have it the result of any sudden shock might be fatal to his patient, weak as he was from loss of blood; and a sufferer, too, from a serious disorder.

But this revival her brother told of brought back the letter to her mind, and she said to him as they rose from the breakfast-table: "I suppose the letter may be given to him now?" And he replied: "If the doctor permits it. He must be asked." To which she said: "Of course." But neither had then the slightest suspicion of the contents of this letter.

Dr. Phinehas, being asked, raised no objection, but would have the letter first fumigated as a precaution; and it may be he was right, so subtle are the conditions of contagious disorders. Lucinda, having agreed to this, was glad to leave the delivery of the letter in her brother's hands and the doctor's, and to withdraw from mixing herself in any way with the matter, as one having no longer any concern in the affairs of Sir Oliver.

So, as she goes away to ride for an hour by herself, towards sunset—for this was late in the day, after Dr. Phinehas had come and gone—Vincent her brother, speaking somewhat lightly of the fumigation business as but a needless farce, takes the letter, now supposed safe to

handle, and bears it straight to the bedside of the wounded man; still in his bandages, and like to remain so, for until the healing is sure and firm, risk would be madness. Most strange is his keen interest in his late opponent; and, indeed, that of the whole household, that this man should recover, seeing what his deeds have been. But it is in Nature that it should be so, for no fly is so poisonous but that he who saves it from drowning wishes it quick recovery.

So, as Vincent stood near the bed, having found its occupant in a half-sleep, and seeing no reason to rouse him to read a letter that had already lain three days in the house, he felt his wish for the patient's recovery run sharply counter to his memory of the past—a memory that still held firm his sister's wrong and his father's murder; for it was murder still, to Vincent. But the present had the best of it, and when Sir Oliver, opening his eyes at the sound of a footstep, spoke a greeting to him clearer and better than heretofore, he could put a good heart into his answer, and seemed to mean the hope he uttered that in a while Sir Oliver would be fit to travel—at any rate, the journey betwixt the Old Hall and the New. But do what he would, he had to stop short of a protest against his own speech, which might have seemed to desire an unwelcome guest's early departure; although, indeed, he had no such meaning.

“I have not deserved this of you, Mr. Mauleverer,” said Sir Oliver. “I would say rather, I have deserved nothing but ill of you and yours. But you take my meaning? . . . Thank you!—yes, that is very comfortable.”

Vincent, as he helped to raise the speaker on his pillow, half formed the thought to say to him, “We have an en-

counter to finish, and I can well pray that your strength may return quickly," but he kept it unsaid, to choose a better time for the saying of it, should all go well, saying only: "Had the chance been mine, Sir Oliver, you would have played the part that has fallen to me, and made no stint—never doubt it!" This was all he saw his way to the utterance of, a little grudgingly.

"I trust indeed I might have had the grace to do so," said Oliver. "For are we not brothers, each bound to take the other's part against the act of God?" To which Vincent replied nothing; for, though he was not sorry to hear the patient speak thus like himself, the words spoken had too much in them of a light impiety current at the time to be altogether acceptable to him. But feelings of this sort seldom went with him the length of a reproof to another. He had the letter to turn to, and had no desire to make his visit a long one.

"This letter, Sir Oliver," said he, "has been kept back from you at the doctor's bidding, and has now been three days awaiting your recovery. I am glad to say he thinks you now well enough to read it."

"How the devil does his worshipful sagacity know what's in it?" said Sir Oliver. "Will he be my security that it is not a tailor's bill? What is all this, wrote on the cover?" He was raised up on pillows now, and could see the writing well as he took the letter from Vincent, who explained briefly the nature of this superscription and its reason, and accounted for the strange smell—for Oliver put it to his nose—by telling of the fumigation. "Our Dr. Phinehas is fanciful," said he, "but with a show of reason now and again."

Then says Oliver, turning the letter about, as folk do when they have no guess of the contents: "Here's a

gaudy show of black seals. Is the King dead?" Whereas had he supposed nothing therein unknown to him, he would have broken the seals straightway, and no more ado. But then of a sudden his face shows a change, and clouds over with thought, and an eagerness to get at the gist of these black seals. He rips them open with an abrupt thumb, and is in a moment deep in a close-written missive in a lawyer's hand. So deep that Vincent says: "I will leave you to the reading of this, Sir Oliver, and return later—though, indeed, there is nothing we need say"—and makes as though to depart. But Oliver checks him with, "I pray you, one moment! Bear with this for one moment," and reads through his letter with a "Humph!" at intervals. Then he throws it from him, saying: "'Tis an ill wind blows no man any good. . . . Ay—read it if you have a mind, good Vincent!" And then lies back on the pillow, as though his effort had cost him dear, but in no great concern about the contents of the letter. His part of the provisional suspension of hostility he accepts cordially enough, so that his showing of this letter to Vincent does not seem to the latter to imply that it concerns *him* more than another. He takes it from the coverlid where it has fallen, without suspicion of its contents.

But then *his* face, too, changes—indeed, more than Sir Oliver's had done—and an angry flush grows upon it as he reads, and now and again comes a look of horror, or, at least, extremest concern. Time is needed for the reading of it, and some of it calls for re-reading as soon as he has finished it. Then he lays it again where it was at first, saying nothing: but there is scorn or anger, or both, in his glance at the figure on the bed, and in his lip and nostril.

“A tale to make the flesh creep, good Vincent.” So says Oliver, not a whit moved; and then goes on, as though some tale or ballad were the subject:—“Who would have thought the Inns of Court could breed a poet?”

“I fear he writes but facts that are afoot, Sir Oliver. I see none of the poetry. I would I could think it were so, and that he overstretched speech to arouse belief in sluggish minds. But there be tales such as these on every tongue now, and ’tis said that all who can are flying from the city, even as Lot and his kith flew from Sodom.”

“Spoke like a book, dear sir, and a good book to boot! Now I would give a crown to know—was Lot glad or sorry at heart that the Lord should change his wife to a pillar of salt? What think you?” But Vincent had by this become again absorbed in the letter, having taken it from the coverlid, of set purpose, perhaps; for Oliver’s talk, which would have been good for a laugh had a child spoken it, grated on him, seeing the man it came from. At his irresponsive silence, Oliver chafes a little, or it may be his healing wound galls him. For the voice in which he says, “Better read it—better read it aloud!” shows a little imperiously; a tone the relation of these two men scarcely warrants. But Vincent shows no resentment on this account.

“From the beginning?” says he simply, as he turns back to the first sheet.

“Heavens, no! Spare us the compliments. Get to the facts. What does he say of the card-players?—overleaf. . . .”

“‘Her ladyship had won great sums?’ . . . will that do? . . . all right!—I will go on there. ‘Her ladyship had won great sums, and was in a mighty exultation

for her success, and would fain have continued the play, though it was daylight. But Monsignor Crecy, her partner, complaining of a dizziness or nausea, having drunk, he said, too freely of mulled claret, and she herself being taken with a most violent sneezing fit, and thereto my Lord Carlyon and his lady who made up their party, swearing they had lost enough for two nights' play in one, the card-play was stopped, and the Lady Arbella was removed in her sedan, taking with her the whole of her winnings in notes and gold, and under guard of an armed footman bearing a loaded blunderbuss. For the City is nowhere safe now, since this fearful matter of the new Plague, from which I beseech your worship to keep away, there being no safety for any man, even the strong and healthy falling suddenly in the very streets, never reaching home alive. Now, as I am informed, having made the best inquiry I may, this armed man, following afoot, and close to the bearer of the chair, quite without any warning drops his blunderbuss, and lies groaning on the pavement. By mere good-fortune this chanced near St. James's Palace, where, by order of our gracious King, there be litters standing day and night to bear away all victims of this dire epidemic to their homes, if not too distant, or, if they have wherewithal to pay charges, to the nearest refuge, where they may be taken in if there be room, as may have been the case with this man. But of this I know nothing. The chairmen waited not to see the outcome, but went on their way, telling the Lady Arbella the knave was but drunk, and they would get her home. But they seem to have been scared away by rufflers or footpads, at whose mercy the chair and its occupant were left, while they went to summon help. Returning with the watch, they found the chair had been



carried away, nor was it heard of again until midday, when information came to her Ladyship's house that a lady was dead of the Plague in a sedan-chair tight-closed, near to the place that is called the Ducking Pond, by Mayfair, no great distance from Buckingham House; and that she was so found, but not long dead, her money and jewels being still untouched. This, indeed, is all that is known of the manner of her death. She was borne with all care to her house, but at great cost, none being found with courage to venture on the task but a monstrous bribe must be paid him. Thus also the undertaker of interments will have no less a sum than one hundred pounds for a leaden coffin, such as befits the quality of the deceased, if he have to place therein the remains, which now lie well sprinkled with lime in an out-house in the garden of her Ladyship's late residence in the Oxford Road. For the doctors say, and doubtless truly, that this death shows a fearful energy in the specific virus of the disease, quite out of the common, the whole duration of the case not having exceeded eight hours. For they consider that the morbid agent was already active when her Ladyship sneezed at the card-table, of which fact my Lord Carlyon is my informant . . ."

Sir Oliver interrupted the reader, saying: "Do not let me trouble you further. That is what I wished to hear. Perhaps it is as well that I went not to London." Then he added, speaking with the easy manner of a perfect indifference: "This Carlyon married a sort of cousin."

"Of yours?"

"Of Lady Raydon's."

Vincent then, feeling that his concern in this matter belonged rather to the terrible calamity of this disease, which was slaying men as the murrain slays cattle, than

to these special victims of whom he knew nothing, nevertheless conceived in the courtesy of his heart that their case called for a word of mere human sympathy. So he said—for he had no great choice of matter, so strange were all the names to him—"This lady, who has come by so terrible an end, was she a near friend of Lady Raydon's—this lady . . . 'Arbella'—was it?" He glanced again at the letter, to make the name sure.

But before he raised his eyes from it, he could tell that Oliver was laughing at him, but in a certain way cautiously, keeping in view his wound. "Why, God-americy, man," said he, "she *was* Lady Raydon herself!" And then he let himself laugh a shade more easily, for the sheer enjoyment of the thing, despite the risk he ran. "Lot's wife—call her for the nonce—ho, ho!"

Then indeed Vincent's brows knit, and his eyes were stern, and his voice indignant, as he said: "A week since, Sir Oliver, I held you at my mercy. A many would cry out upon me for a cowardly mock sentiment, that I should spare a man fairly disarmed who had slain my father, and done my sister wrong beyond his power to remedy. God forgive me that I should regret my clemency! But I cannot but do so when I hear you speak thus, close on so terrible a death of the woman to whom you at least owed a pretence of respect. At least, she was your wife, and bore your name. Have you no heart at all, man!—not so much as to affect decent speech beside a new-made grave?"

"I doubt it, good Vincent. On the whole, I incline to think not. If there be any left, it is in the keeping of thy Lucinda. As for the worthy woman who bore my name; as for Lot's wife—pardon me, I can't help laughing!—all I can say is, I would she had died sooner, for my

greater convenience and the avoidance of a miscarriage that may be, as you say, past remedy. But if it be so, be my witness, I beg of you, that it is now by no fault of mine. For look you!—the remedy is in my hand now, if Lucinda be not averse to the accepting of it. 'Tis for her to choose."

Vincent heard him in silence, and seemed to doubt for a moment whether he understood him rightly. Then he spoke as though the interval had made it plain:

"She shall have the choice, Sir Oliver, though there is blood on the hand you offer! And you shall not be kept waiting long for her answer." He rose and quitted the room. But as he did so his words to himself were that he knew the answer beforehand. And his anticipation was true, for he returned within a quarter of an hour, having met Lucy returning from her ride; saying: "My sister will none of your offer, Sir Oliver. And I do not scruple to rejoice it is so, though a many might say a good brother should grieve at it. . . . No—I have not influenced her." For Oliver had half begun to speak, with forecast of reproach in his voice.

"Never mind!" said he. "Let the wench bide! She may see reason to think better of it. *Varium et mutabile semper fœmina!*" For in those days catchwords and quoted phrases of easy Latinity were more common speech than now.

And, indeed, it did seem as though in this case woman was a varying and changeable thing, for early the next day comes Lucinda to her brother, and would speak with him, and then told him that her mind was changed about her refusal of Sir Oliver's proposal. "But this I charge you, Vincent," said she, "that you ask me no reasons. Take

my word for it, I would soonest have it thus, and blame me not that I am ready to become the wife of the man whose sword slew our father. I do this thing for no gain of my own, nor even that I think it wrong to withhold from Oliver such chance as may be of amends for his share in our sin. I have my reason, and a good one; else should I stickle to ask thee, my brother, to take, as a brother, a hand dyed in our own blood. Now, therefore, dearest boy, press me to tell no more, but go straightway to Oliver, and say that I am willing to become his wife. Say no further than that—that if he has not wavered in his intent, I for my part am willing to become his wife.”

Thereupon Vincent seemed for awhile lost in thought, his eyes resting constantly on the beautiful face that looked up at him, wherein he could find no trace of irresolution or doubt. Seeing, then, nothing in its aspect to warrant him in any hope that she would change her intent, he presently said: “Well—I will go.” But did not at once go, gazing still gravely and thoughtfully on her face. At length he said briefly: “I have guessed your reason, little Lucy.” And then either of them seemed to know the other’s thought, though she gave no assent in words, and he left her, to tell Sir Oliver of the change in her mind towards him. But this was strange, that she should not offer to tell him herself. Yet by what canon or rule of conduct shall we judge a woman in a position in which no man can ever be placed, and but a few women, for which God be praised; and even then only such as have in some sense broken His law, and slighted His commandment!

So we need not wonder that speculation is at a loss in seeking to account for Lucinda’s shrinking from the

presence of the man she was so soon to call her husband. Let it be!—for even if surmise were possible, it may be language would be at fault to tell it, or hard to find. This alone is certain, that during the days that had to pass before the preliminaries of their wedding were complete, she refused to enter the room where he still lay, dragging on through a slow recovery, for the healing of his wound was backward, and any movement would have been a danger to him. Yet, more than once, when her brother was (to her knowledge) in the room, on a visit to the wounded man which he made at stated intervals, she waited stealthily at the door, listening for the voices within, but moving quickly and quietly away whenever a sound came as of an interview that ends; a thing of which one may easily judge from a tone of joyousness at near parting, not in all cases easy to understand. Not that she could overhear the words within, or had any wish to do so; but that she found a tepid pleasure in this stunted presence at the interviews of Oliver and Vincent. Mere longing for the companionship of human voices it was not, for had she chosen she might have alleviated her solitude in a thousand ways. But she denied herself to all who sought her, even to many she had known from childhood, and lived in her own heart making no confidence with any, though she could not avoid seeing and speaking with guests that came and went. But these were usually received by the two old ladies her aunts, who lived apart without hostility, under one of those tacit compacts that grow in families; always joining in family meals or family prayers, and retiring with ceremony afterwards to their especial room; a practice not to be accounted for, but religiously observed, and seeming a part of the essence of things to the younger

generation, for whom nothing had been otherwise since childhood.

At this time these ladies were so far recovering from the shock of their brother's death, and the almost worse calamity, as they accounted it, of their niece's elopement with a married man, as to encourage the visits of a few very old friends of the family from the neighbourhood. But though it was impossible for Lucinda to keep quite out of sight, her intercourse with these was limited to mere exchange of courtesies, and in the absence of her foster-brother Roger Locke, she scarcely saw anyone but her brother Vincent, and seemed best contented that it should be so. And so the time passed until the day fixed for the unostentatious ceremony which was to make her the wife, in law, as she accounted herself in fact, of the man who had betrayed her innocence, slain her father, and strained deception to its utmost—a man who had shown himself, too, so callous a brute to that poor victim of the Plague, so miserably dead; the image of whom, derived from Vincent's report of the contents of that letter, hung in Lucinda's mind like a nightmare. That lime-sprinkled thing that had lived and breathed so lately, in the outhouse of its late home, none daring to approach or touch it, was a sickening image to a mind like hers. Was this woman not his wedded wife after all? They had quarrelled—yes! But many couples quarrel, and live apart, and yet remain human.

Yet this manifest unveiling of the soul of this man, its seeming callousness and cynicism, became no obstacle to Lucinda's resolve to become his legal wife. And this although her whole heart revolted against the received idea of so many women that a past sin is wiped away by the formal usage of the Sacrament, and vanishes before



the blessing of a priest. Although, too, she knew well that the world's scorn of a successful man's captured quarry would only be outwardly abated by it. All the finger-pointings, the whisperings behind palms, the chamber-chat and under-smiles, would go on just the same about my Lady Raydon, Sir Oliver's second wife, as they had done—never doubt it!—about Lucy Mauleverer. Whatever of honour and respect was paid her would be paid to her rank, to a position she had never coveted; none of it to herself. Whatever the impulse had been that changed her first resolve to leave her lover for good, it had worked in spite—not with the help—of any of the inducements that would have weighed with another woman. So this impulse was a strong one, no doubt; and the fact that no further allusion was made to it by either herself or her brother looks as though she was well satisfied that he understood her, and that he for his part knew it.

The two old ladies, Aunt Araminta and Aunt Elsie, when first told of the death of Lady Raydon and the proposed marriage of their niece, placed themselves in an attitude of meek revolt. How could they altogether overlook the past? How could they receive their new nephew, a rake and profligate, with their own brother's blood upon his hands? No!—let Lucy marry her lover if she would. It was not for them to stand in the way of such repentance and expiation as might be; such amends as the outraged honour of the family demanded. But let *them* remain quite out of it. Why should their welcome to Oliver go beyond the claim of a formal necessity they were ready to acknowledge for Lucinda's sake? Let the married couple, when the knot was tied, be off to the New Hall and lead a life that would please them, no

doubt, among friends of their own choice. . . . Oh no!—they would not interdict all visits of the new-married couple at the Old Hall. Certainly not! That would only provoke gossip. All they meant was—let *them* keep out of it! Why not leave them at peace in their own suite of apartments, where they neither made nor meddled with the outside affairs of the household?

Vincent, on whom the task of negotiating with them fell, made every concession to the attitude of reserve they desired to maintain after the new state of things was fairly established, provided only that they gave their consent and countenance to the wedding, and attended the ceremony. He pointed out the injury their refusal to do so would occasion to Lucinda, and to this they gave their assent. But they nearly withdrew it on hearing that Lucinda had decided to be married in black, saying—very much to Vincent's surprise, for he had anticipated their approval—that such a course would bring lasting disgrace on the family. He could not understand this, but to our thinking many women might have thought the same; their idea being that though the past could not be changed, it might at least be ignored. Men and women see these things differently.

Lucinda made some concession about her dress; for, what did she care? She cared for nothing, in fact, whatever her motives were, but to go through with the thing, having once agreed to it.

So the days pass on—the few days needed for completion of needful arrangements, and for a greater safety for Sir Oliver when the time comes for him to leave his couch. There he is to remain to the last moment, to have his fullest chance of a complete recovery. Through these days Lucinda lives much alone, speaking little but

to her brother; riding alone by choice; even without the groom, when going no great distance from home. Much of her day is spent in her own garden,—for the season is still mild, and there is no rain, more than is needed to keep the air fresh overhead and the turf green underfoot—but some of it at the virginal, only that she never found her voice to sing, seeming, too, to grudge speech and live in a mute despair, neither taking joy from the prospect before her, nor shrinking from it. Having chosen, she was resolute. But she always refused to go to the bedside of the wounded man, saying: “What can it matter to Oliver that he should see me again a day sooner or later? Let him get well of his injury, and be content.” And in this she had the support of Dr. Phinehas.

It is a strange household during those few days: the lonely woman, shunning all companionship, the silent master visiting at intervals the murderer’s bedside—for he calls him by no other name in his heart still, for all he is so soon to be Lucinda’s husband and his brother—the hushed voices of the servants, the weight of the silence that is felt the more for the few sounds that break it. Now and then, the shouted speech to the queer deaf old surgeon when he makes his daily visit, or a distant phrase on the harpsichord in the twilight. And in the midst of it the cause of all, lying on the bed of the man he slew; chafing now under the restraint, but not venturing to rebel; unrepentant in his wicked heart, even with a sneaking triumph hanging round it, the triumph of the gambler who has staked high and won. If there is one throb in that heart that makes for his redemption, it is the one that is stirred by the thought that Lucinda is to be again his own. His own this time, not as a banquet to mere satiety, to be flung away at pleasure; but as a

magic jewel to be worn, reflecting from its facets some sun his eyes have of themselves no power of seeing, giving a light half-unwelcome at one time to his soul. It may now penetrate to its recesses, to reach and slay the foul insect-growths that light destroys. Or he may be the Oliver we have known him to the end.

## CHAPTER XXI

OF all sad ceremonials, a melancholy wedding is the saddest. It might be less so, if usage and tradition would but accept its sadness—acknowledge it and consent to silence. But it is distinctly understood that marriage-bells are merry; and the blacker the cloud that hangs about the hearts of the principal actors, the more does the complaisant guest conceive it his duty to be cheerful. Yet a point may be reached where no grin can be feigned, to make the celebration less like a funeral.

Such a point, at the wedding of Sir Oliver and Lucinda, owed its being to the knowledge common to all, spoken of by none, that the bride's father, beloved through all the countryside, had died—and that not so long ago—by the hand of the bridegroom. The fact that the couple had anticipated their opportunities before the tragic death, from the Plague, of a wife who was tacitly assumed to have been the only obstacle to a legal marriage, might have been forgotten. For these things happen, one knows; and if one is not prepared to forget them on occasion shown, why come to the wedding at all?

Lucinda held firmly to her resolution not to see Sir Oliver; and her first sight of him was at the little village church where the marriage was solemnised. Or, rather—would have been, had her eyes rested on him. But all that can be said is, that if they did, none saw it. For, as the guests who were bidden to the Hall followed the footsteps of the bride and bridegroom, returning, there was

but one word among them, spoken above the breath of none: "She never looked at him!" And the like speech was current among the neighbours and villagers who dispersed after the ceremony.

It seemed a common consent that there should be no festivity. The guests departed early. Within a couple of hours after the completion of the ceremony, all but one or two were on their way home, talking over the story of it all; ascribing to the bridegroom a repentance for his past misdeeds, on the strength of a pallor of face and faltering step that were due probably only to his recent loss of blood; and to the bride—for they were less charitable to her—a harder heart than each of them, for one, would ever have suspected in her. But they admitted that, behind that stony demeanour, there might be something concealed. Who can penetrate the human heart? And so on. Let them all go, and talk it out to their own liking.

Sir Oliver was near the last ebb of his powers by the time all had gone, and stood in need of assistance to reach his sleeping-room, where he might lie down to recover from what had been a great fatigue to a man slowly regaining strength after so profuse a loss of blood. He did so at once, and very shortly fell into a deep sleep, and nothing was to be gained by disturbing him; moreover, Dr. Phinehas, who had deprecated so much exertion—saying if the wedding were to come off, it would be safest to bring the parson to the patient's bedside—was of opinion that Sir Oliver had best sleep on as long as Nature should dictate. So he was undisturbed, and did not wake, as every pains was taken to insure quiet, until well on into the dusk.



Now the arrangement had been agreed upon, as Oliver was still in this stage of convalescence, that no attempt should be made to get him over to his own house; but that he and the new-made, or newly-ratified, Lady Raydon should remain for the present at the Old Hall, at least until Sir Oliver should be safe in a saddle, a thing as yet out of the question, except a mount could be found a very miracle of meekness. His own horse, Alcibiades, was scarcely that. For a slight shaking might renew the hæmorrhage, said Dr. Phinehas, and a recrudescence of a wound is a double evil. And this arrangement being made, by common consent, it was nowise strange that the married couple should be left in sole possession of the house; although in this case the occasion scarcely called for the fulfilment of the usage which leaves new-wedded folk to their own company. Nor was it altogether, for the two old ladies still kept their part of the house, showing their consciousness of the tenants of the other part by speaking in undertones, and treading noiselessly; a thing which had no foundation in necessity, but seemed to comply with some unwritten law.

With the exception of Vincent, who was not sorry to get quit of Sir Oliver without taking leave of him formally, an observance that would have had its embarrassments, Roger Locke was the last to quit the house; heavy enough at heart, as may be imagined. Then Vincent found himself standing alone with Lucinda, in doubt if his wisest course would not be to say farewell in silence. He had settled to go, at a friend's invitation, to a house at some distance, definitely to remain there until Sir Oliver should be able to return to his own home. Surely it was impossible that they two should live under one roof! The wounded man's wavering between life and

death had made a curious relation between them possible for the time being, due somehow—Vincent acknowledged the oddity of this to himself—to the mere supineness of the man he hated, helpless on a bed. But to see him moving about the house . . . his sister's husband! . . . his father's murderer! . . . Vincent knew from his short experience of the ceremony that life on such terms would be unendurable. Yet he could not have opposed the marriage—impossible! Oh, that he had given short shrift when he had the villain at his sword's point! Had he not perhaps thought more of a Quixotic chivalry than of his duty to his father?

Such thoughts mixed themselves with the unspoken question, "What will my sister say?" as he stood there looking in her pallid, weary face; forgiving her all her past, only in dread for her future. Even if he had not known of her revolt against Oliver; even if he could have imagined that her old infatuation still lived, how could he augur well of such an alliance, so made—with such a man? But, for Lucinda, it was the only road to a patched-up honour, and, above all, the only justice possible to that veiled future, the life of a babe unborn. He could have no right to stand between his sister and the strongest claim of Nature's scheming, the child's claim upon the parent for an undishonored name. So he reasoned with himself as he awaited her words to come.

But she never spoke; she left speech to her brother. Her face touched his in silence, but it was with cold lips, and he could feel the coldness of her cheek as it met his. As he stood there, holding her in his arms, just about to say farewell, there shot across his mind a memory of old days, that cut him to the heart. A memory of his own parting from his two little sisters under that very porch

on a windy morning in the spring, eight years ago; and of Lucy saying with confidence, of the day of his return: "We shall both be married when you come back, Vin." Whereupon Amy had helped prediction boldly, saying: "Yes. And Lucy's baby is to be a little boy. And mine is to be a little girl." For Amy was very young and inexperienced. But Lucy, better informed, had said: "Hush, Amy dear, you mustn't talk like that." And then of his riding away in a rainbow shower, tears in his eyes and his heart full to bursting—for he had never left the girls before, only for school. But it shot across his mind now, and the world was the darker to him for the thought of that wild hour of childish recklessness and hope. He found no words in the end, and had to choke back a sob as he gave his sister his last kiss and turned to go. Then she spoke.

"Oh, Vincent darling, do not go! Wait—wait till I can speak. . . ." And then, in a lower tone, speaking quickly: "You *did* understand me? You *do* understand me? I mean you understand why . . ."

"Oh yes—yes, yes—I understand." He spoke a little more, almost in a whisper, close to her ear. To which she replied aloud: "That was what I meant." Then he too raised his voice, and spoke more hopefully. "Making the worst of things will not bring our father back to life. Nothing will change the past, for us. At least let us give the future a chance. I tell thee this, Lucy, that if Oliver had not spoiled his act of grace, I might have had my hopes of him. . . ."

"Tell me how you mean—'spoiled his act of grace?'"

"I mean he might have had a decent respect, or made a pretence of it, for that poor lady that is dead of the Plague. But none can know he was in earnest over it.

And he has shown some spirit of repentance in his bearing to thee, my Lucy. It may be he will be a better old man than a young one. Hope, Lucy, hope!" But this was only good will for his sister's sake, for he could not for the life of him keep from adding: "And yet—he slew our father!"

Then Lucinda made a curious speech. "I shall not be much with Oliver," said she. But she said it so slightly, and finished so quickly with "Better ride before the rain comes! Good-bye, dearest brother—never fret about me!" that Vincent let slip his first impulse to ask her to explain, and never recalled it until, a mile on his road, it came back to him to wonder what she had meant.

Said Dr. Phinehas that evening, coming from Sir Oliver's room, having been in attendance most part of the day, as a precaution: "If my advice is taken, my Lady Raydon"—he was mighty particular about Lucinda's style and title now—"the worshipful Sir Oliver will do well to take entire rest after his exertions of to-day, which have been to my thinking ill-advised. Your ladyship's influence may work with an intractable patient that is beyond my powers to control. I beseech you to use it to the end that he may remain recumbent until all local pain of healing has subsided." Then, after a word or two of protest against Sir Oliver's attitude of revolt against all medical advice, he took his departure, full of dignity.

Then goes Lucinda to the couch where her lover, now her husband, is lying. He is in a half-dozed still, his sleepiness seeming unconquerable. She watches him for a few moments in silence, then goes away to the window, and looks out over the dusky land, now swept by a rain-drift, though the sundown has left a long rift of light on the horizon. Her face has no change or movement on it, but

tears are there, plain in the gleam to the little maid Nell, who is attending to some small matter of the room's arrangements.

Presently comes Oliver's voice from the couch: "Lucinda—where art thou, silly girl? Dost thou know what thou art, Lucy? My wife, wench—think o' that!"

She stands beside him white and nerveless; lets him take her inanimate hand, but has no answer ready for him;—says only, "They are all gone now," meaning that they are now alone in the house.

"Let them go or stay!—what a plague care I? Thou art off the point, girl. Come, speak me fair, Lucy mine! Say I have done thee one good turn. There's never another doxy of mine I would have done the like for. What the devil, woman!—what would you have a man do?"

"I have no fault to find with you for this, Oliver. You have done right by me, and the end is gained."

"Why, then—what more would you have? What's to fret and shiver about? Dry thy tears, lass, and let's have an end on't. 'Odsflesh, Lucy, where is thy Christian forgiveness? Was it such a crime to keep thee a bit longer in ignorance about that luckless thrust of mine?" . . .

"It was no luckless thrust, Oliver, but had a deadly intent. You are my husband, but my father's blood is upon you."

"Luckless or no, where would the gain have been to thee to know it, till none could have it otherwise—a month or so sooner or later. Where is the great grievance against me that I played off a little act of policy to keep some bad news back awhile, for thy ease and comfort as well as my own, silly wench? Besides, 'tis the old story of the gnat

and the camel. He who can stomach the great brute, hump and all, need not be so peevish about a mere fly. Where was it so great an offence, to keep you in the dark about the way the luck fell. . . . What?—you cannot understand! What is it you cannot understand? . . . Come, Lucy, you forgave me the mischance once—forget me now the story of the letters, and be thyself again. At least call me not murderer, after a clean shrift once given. 'Tis a shabby trick, girl, to go back on forgiveness."

This is all mystery to Lucinda, and complete bewilderment is in her voice, as she says, "What your meaning can be, Oliver, I cannot conceive. Why—when have I spoken a word of pardon . . . of pardon, think of it!—think of it!—for my father's murder. . . . But you are mad, Oliver; this is madness." And she shudders as she thinks to herself how Dr. Phinehas had told her we must always beware of insanity in those subject to the falling sickness.

But Oliver's bewilderment is equal to hers. He half rises on his couch, crying out "Why, God-a-mercy! . . ." and then sinks back, exclaiming: "Was it, after all, a trick of that jade's witchcraft?"

"What on earth is all this?" says Lucinda. And her fear grows in her heart that Oliver is really insane, and stops her speech. But she is herself again before he sees his way to another word. "Was *what* a trick of witchcraft?" she says, clearly enough.

He swings up from the couch, disregarding the doctor's caution. "Have you forgotten!" he cries. "*Can* you have forgotten that time in the dark, at Kips?—after the storm?—after I told you?"

She sits and thinks. "What *do* I remember?" she



says. And then, "I left you, Oliver, lying in your fit, upon the floor."

"No more than that?"

"No. After that I rode away with John Rackham. . . . Yes—stop, though! I returned and kissed you; shame for me that I did so! *Then* I rode away."

"Yes—yes—yes! But *before* you rode away! We spoke. . . ."

"No!"

"Yes, I tell you! I remember all plainly. I came to my senses, and there you were, in the dark . . . yes—I felt your lips on my face. . . ."

"Oh, Oliver, how could that be? You lay there insensible . . . well!—you never spoke!"

"*I* never spoke! *I* spoke, I tell you, plainly, and you spoke back. . . ."

"Never!"

"I tell you I *did*. . . . No—I do not recollect all I said. But I did say 'Have you not forgiven me?' And you answered me plain, 'Surely, Oliver, surely!' Why, I can remember the very rings on your fingers—there in the dark. And then you called Trant, to get us a light. You must recollect that! The storm was over, and there was never a gleam of lightning to see by, nor no moon. Oh, but you *must* remember!" His voice has alarm in it such as shows in the tones of one who mistrusts touch or eyesight, or is conscious of something eerie afoot.

Lucinda controls the alarm she too feels, but it is for his reason. "It was a dream," she says, quietly enough. "Why—only hearken to this! I had ridden well past Merrows Camp when the storm burst. How could I be in two places at once? 'Twas a dream, Oliver—a dream!" But she had a sort of pity too for him, that he should have

built upon a seeming pardon, though it was only an hallucination of a distempered mind.

This time, the thing has been spoken of, and he will not let it pass. "A dream!" says he. "How could it be a *dream*? If it were one, Trant dreamed it as well as I. . . . How do I know? Plain enough. She heard you calling to her aloud to strike a light, and come. I heard you call to her myself, after you left me—in the dark, I tell you. No—no—no, Lucy! If I dreamed it, she dreamed it too. 'Twas no dream."

"And this was after the storm?"

"After the storm."

"And I was half a league on the road before the storm began. No, Oliver—you have told me too many lies for me to receive that story. 'Tis a make-believe. . . ."

"But why? A make-believe of what?" He is struck with the extremest perplexity, and a fear for his own reason, too.

"You would make me out a fool, Oliver. But you speak so fair, and seem so sure, that I half doubt you believe your own crazy story."

"Oh, Lucy—I know it. 'Tis more than believing. How can I think it other than true?" Then he beseeches her to hear him tell again the whole tale, taking each point closely in its order. But every detail brings with it a new discrepancy. When Dame Hatsell heard the horses' hoofs below, was it not before she slept? When Mrs. Trant was called up from her bed to get a light, was it not after? The folly of it all! How could Lucinda be calling for a light, there in the house, two hours after she had been heard departing? How could the stable be empty—John Rackham roused from sleep, and two horses saddled, almost as soon as Mrs. Trant came downstairs

with her light? Nay—how came her departure with the groom to be noiseless? This last puzzle, strange to say, strikes Oliver more than all the comparisons of time and place. He cannot get over it.

At last he becomes in a sense frantic, flinging prudence to the winds and angrily pacing the room. "I tell you, I tell you," says he, again and again, "it is *impossible* I should be mistaken!" So convinced is she now that he has been under an hallucination that she merely sits silent, waiting for his violence to subside. She says coldly at last: "You had better rest, Oliver. You know what Dr. Phinehas has said." To which he replies: "To the Devil with the doctor! Give him his fee and send him packing."

Presently he becomes quieter, but is still in a ferment of mind, struggling for a gleam of explanation. He sits down by Lucinda, and it is the first time the bridegroom of this strange wedding has been near the bride, since a purely formal salute after the ceremony in the morning. He takes her hand and closes his eyes as he draws her fingers across his lips. She has half shrunk away from him; but then, recognising his intent, says, "Oh—that!" and leaves him her hand, adding, a moment after, "Well?" as though asking for the sequel of his thought. For she sees that he is once more trying to rehearse that experience in the dark at Kips Manor.

"It *was* your hand, Lucy," says he, "say what you may! It *was* your hand. I can tell each ring as I touch it. There be the three diamonds, the emerald, and the cornelian. And as for the ring that this day has dubbed you my Lady Raydon—'twas not upon the hand then. . . ."

She interrupted him. "Now listen, Oliver! This may

convince you. When you sent for those rings that I should wear them again at the wedding, did you not say to Vincent that they were found by the mirror in my tiring-room. Now I ask you, who took them there?"

Oliver's face showed his bewilderment. "Yourself, girl—or the Devil," said he. "Who else could?"

"If they were on my hand when I came out and went upstairs, no one else could, sure enough. But when did I return to the inner room? Tell me that. Oh, Oliver, 'tis all a fantastic dream together."

Oliver assumed a cool tone of judgment due to his superiority of sex. "Now look at this possibility," said he. "Suppose the rings had been there all the time! How then?"

"All the time your lips felt them on my hand?" says she. Then Oliver, having nothing else for it, becomes impatient again, on a new line. "That fiend Trant was in it, with her damned witchcraft." He mutters to himself, but she overhears him, and says, "At least, Trant could tell us."

"If she be not burned at the stake for her practices, or sent to the bottom of a pond."

"Oliver!—what have you done with Trant?"

"Done with Trant—I? Nothing at all, 'pon my honour—ho, ho! But what the King's Justices at Bury have done with her—that's another matter. I warrant she's got no more than she deserves, anyway!"

A horror is creeping over Lucinda's face. "You may as well tell me," she says. "What have you done with Susan Trant?"

"Zounds, girl, I did not know she was such a favourite of thine! What would you have had me do with Susan Trant, but what I have done?"

“What have you done?”

“Faith!—nothing at all, myself. But I have had speech about her with a worthy magistrate at Bury, and she will have to appear at the next Assizes for her pranks. They may settle it off between them, as best they may. If it goes ill with her, lay it to John Rackham’s door. ’Tis none of my deposition that will hang or burn her. John Rackham must answer it.” Then he told briefly how he had waited on the magistrates at Bury, and had laid an information against Susan, but had heard no further thereon, and was little likely to do so, seeing the distance across country, and that all letters must travel first to London, and indeed miscarried more times than not.

But it stood thus with Lucinda, that so long as the inward force of her love for this man, now her husband, remained in her system like the virus of a disease, she could see no offence but one of his in a true light. He had slain her father, and she made no scruple to call it murder; but for this action against Mrs. Trant, malignant as it might be accounted by others, she was ready with justifications and excuses. Consider this also: that in her day the witch was held to be truly in league with the Devil, and entitled to mercy at the hands of no true Christian. So that this action of Oliver’s against Mrs. Trant did not present itself to her mind as a cruel persecution, but as possibly even an act of justice and public duty. It may be that her love for Oliver, never extinct, welcomed—so to speak—an offence she might forgive without self-reproach. Yet not to the extent of abating the coldness of her attitude towards him, and she remained impassive and silent, making little or no answer to his justifications of his conduct, which during the

remainder of that evening he mixed with recurrent attempts to grapple with the unsolved problem of her seeming presence at Kips Manor, when, by her own showing, and his memory of Rackham's testimony, she must have been well on her way to the London Road.

This perplexity he seemed in no mood to forget, recurring to it constantly during the next two days, and visibly brooding over it; arriving at false solutions that seemed at first plausible, then rejecting them as their absurdity became manifest, usually from some shrewd question or comment of Lucinda's. She for her part maintained the same cold demeanour, just conceding to him so much wifely courtesy—the only phrase possible—as would avert an open rupture and hold out hope of some relenting in time to come.

This coldness ought, one might say, to have gone far to check the healthier love that had come lately into Oliver's heart. If it did, a countercheck was supplied by piqued vanity, that would not accept a repulse; and possibly by uneasiness of conscience, hankering unawares after absolution for his past offences from the only person that could give it. Lucinda's love, revived, would wash away the stains on a soul that probably, but for his own newborn experience of love, would have been little disturbed by the memory of an opponent killed in a duel, or some trifling expedients to hide a misdeed from his mistress and keep her in the dark until he should tire of her. From whatever cause, he thought best to show no resentment at this coldness, nor to call in question Lucinda's behaviour towards him; a most unseemly one for a bride, had she been a bride in the sense one gives the word in daily speech. But it is a word that rings false in a case like hers.



The time lagged on without any perceptible change in this entirely strange relationship, through the first days of a most miserable honeymoon. But were they to last to the end of the term that the general consent of mankind expects disillusionment to follow?

Lucinda's cold attitude may seem open to explanation. Oliver's acquiescence in it is harder to understand, but no doubt his delicate condition—for though his wound seemed healed, his blood was still at a low ebb—made him tractable from policy; and quite possibly his way of regarding women as weak, subservient things made for man's pleasure remained ingrained in his foul nature, and he believed that a complete surrender and return to him on the part of this new wife was a foregone conclusion. He had only to wait, and she would come to his arms, all contrition, tears, and apologies. But he was to be roughly undeceived.

"We have been wedded four se'nnights, Mistress Lucy," said he one day, yawning and stretching on a couch. And then again, with a slight varying of his words: "We have been wedded a month, my Lady Raydon."

She replied briefly: "Yes, a month." Her back was turned to him as she stood at the window, looking out on a dull landscape veiled in a drifting rain. So he only half heard the words she added to himself: "I wonder I have borne it."

"What's the wench a-talking of?" He rose from the couch and shook himself, as one does in protest against the irksomeness of a time that drags. "Let's have it out. A good wife, thou knowest, has no secrets from her husband."

"I will have no secrets from you, Oliver. I wonder I have borne it—that is what I said but now. . . . My meaning?—I will tell it you. It sits too heavy upon my soul that I am the wife of the man by whose hand my father died. Is it strange to you that I have found it hard to bear?"

"What the devil does the woman mean?"

"This much, Oliver—for now I must speak." And yet her speech choked her, as she struggled for a new beginning. "Yes, I *must* speak—I *must* speak. . . ."

"I have naught to say against it. Make a clean breast. Never say I put a gag on thy tongue, Mistress Lucy." He threw himself back on the couch, his hands behind his head, his slightly raised eyebrows and mouth pursed to a whistle made for cynical carelessness, half-indulgent to the mad whim of a woman; but he did not meet her eyes, now turned full upon him.

"I shall have to say it sooner or later. . . . We must part."

Oliver started up, all his nonchalance dispersed or dispersing. "*We must part!—we must part!—we must part!*" he repeated. "Why—we are but just wed! Was ever such a crazy Jane-o'-Bedlam! *We must part, forsooth!*" And then he wanted to make a blustering laugh of it, but it fell through.

"I will tell you why, or will try to. I am grateful to you, Oliver, for making me your wife. But it is not for my own sake that the bearing of your name is welcome to me. Listen! There are children of yours in the world who can never bear their father's name honestly, as the world counts honesty. My duty was to *our* child, and I have done it."

Oliver, conceiving that she referred to some vague, un-

certain future, some inheritance none could predict, took her words quite wide of their meaning. "Is it not," said he, "a woman's first duty to her child to give it a chance of life? If we part, it seems to me the brat's chance goes for good. . . ."

"You do not understand me," she said. And there was that in her voice that made him fix his eyes on her, and cry out: "What?—what do you mean? *What* do I not understand?" To which she replied, without change of voice or manner: "You will understand me if you think a moment. . . . You understand me now?"—less as a question than as a confidently spoken fact.

Then he burst out: "Then why—why—oh, *why* have you never said so before?" He started up, pacing excitedly about the room, exclaiming vehemently: "God's my life, girl!—could you not trust me? What the devil!—a dupe—a dupe! You have made me your dupe! . . . Yes!—I tell you—you might have told me. . . . Why was I to be kept in the dark?"

Lucinda only said coldly, "You have given me such good reason for trusting you, Oliver!"—and then waited for his vehemence to subside. It would have been hard to say, as she sat there motionless and silent, whether despair or determination were written plainest on her face.

Presently Sir Oliver's petulance, crude and ill-restrained as a boy's, died away as a boy's dies, and he said with a quieter self-command: "I have done ill by thee, Lucy Mauleverer"—oddly calling by her old name—"but you might have had that much faith in me. Tell me, was it not *something* of amends that my first thought when I had news of my luck was to give you the benefit of it? I tell thee this, girl: there is never another I have seen yet I would have done so much for. And here ends

a month of mere sulking over a thing past recall! Was ever such a bridal? And have I taken it amiss? Come, Lucy, do me justice."

"I am not ungrateful, Oliver. For all the wrong you have done me, you made amends a month since. And was not the sin mine, as well as yours? Was not the slur on our good name—mine, my brother's, my father's—was it not rather of my casting than yours? That might be forgotten; and all that angered me to the heart—that day in the garden—might pass and be forgotten too, for all the resentment I should ever cherish of it. And we might live on in happiness together, till gossip itself had forgot the tale; and see our children grow up about us, never knowing aught of it. Ay, and their children after them! But it cannot be."

"I am a poor hand at guessing enigmas," says Oliver, with a recrudescence of the supercilious tone, mixed with one of impatience, that had given place for a moment to concession and conciliation. "I always give them up. I shall have to ask you to tell the answer, good Lucy." The half-sneer his words conveyed was a healthy stimulant to Lucinda. She can say what she has to say more easily to Oliver scornful and obdurate than to Oliver submissive and yielding.

Whatever she thinks of his way of speech, she passes it by, going direct to the point. "I can live with you no longer, Oliver. If I do, I shall go mad. My father's face is before me every hour of the day, reproaching me with my sin, reproaching me with my wifeness, reproaching me with his death. And so long as I am here I must touch the hand that slew him. And I cannot hate it, for it is yours. . . . Yes—you may think it strange, Oliver, but so it is, and I tell you truth. Life would not be

to me the torment that it has come to be, if I could hate you. Many a wife hates her husband, yet the yoke lies light. Life has to be lived, and a way to live it is found, be it welcome or no! But to have to love perforce what my whole soul cries out upon me for not hating! . . . Oh, Oliver, it will drive me mad—mad—mad! I cannot bear it. I cannot—I *cannot*! Let me go.”

“Sleep upon it, wench,” says Oliver, nursing his disbelief in the reality of all this. A mere hysterical outbreak, that will die! So runs his thought; but he can afford to be magnanimous too, to reason with this crazy wife his Quixotism has shown such indulgence to. “Come, come, Lucy mine,” says he, “is it well to be raking up old scores now? One thing I see though. . . .”

“What is that, Oliver?”

“I see that the sooner we are off to Croxley Thorpe the better. ’Tis this place does it. Thy father’s face is in every corner of the Old Hall; little wonder that you should see it in and out of season. Come away, and send the blue devils packing. Had it not been for this accursed dig in the paunch my own sword must needs give me, we might have ended our wedding-day with a ride home. . . . But who’s to say that I should ever have sought to marry thee in that case? ’Tis all the other way, to my thinking. Had I never been lugged here on that litter, but ridden back safe and sound to Croxley, I should have been much more like to forget sundry promises I may have made—though for the life of me I cannot say when—and all the more for that box o’ the ear you gave me in the garden! But there you were in the house and about it; and, though you kept out of my sight, I had the tokens of you, and knew you were to hand. . . .

How?—by the sound of your voice—by the clavierchord; none too easy to hear thus far off, but good to tell the tune. So, when I got the news of that bit of luck of mine, I was in good trim for thought of thy claims, Lucy, whatever they were. No—no! Saddle up and let's be gone—that's the word now! To-morrow morning, if the weather mends—time enough for a noonday meal."

Then her care for Oliver himself—that was only in abeyance, never dead—outwent all else in Lucinda's mind. "You are mad yourself, Oliver," said she, "to think of such a thing. Remember what Dr. Phinehas said!—'Walking fast would be danger; riding, certain death' . . ."

"Dr. Phinehas may go to the Devil!"

"You say so, Oliver, but which is more like to be right, you or he? Think what a many wounded he has tended in all his years of service with the army." Then she dwelt on the old man's long experience—he was close on eighty, and could actually remember the coming of the great Spanish Armada and its defeat—and the earnestness of his advice to Oliver not to grudge time for a full recovery. She ended: "See what he said, too, and I am sure he is right: 'A green wound is green till it is healed.'"

"And who is to settle whether it be healed or no, except the patient himself? Has the old fool been down my throat to see? Shall I never back a horse again, for fear of an old quack's word? And look you!—every day sooner I throw him and his visits overboard is a guinea the less in his pocket, and one more kept in mine. No, no; I may wait a long time before the old chucklehead says the word that will stop his salary. We'll ride to-morrow, and there will be an end of thy phantasies, silly woman! . . .



What—leave your husband before the ink's dry on the register! What says *divorce a vinculo* to that?" He ran on thus, the outcome of it all being that if Lucinda forsook him, the legitimacy of the child would be impaired or annulled outright. Whether this was true or not, how could Lucinda say? All her experience of life did not mount up to much, all told. And how could she face down the word of an experienced man? The habit of thought that assigns knowledge to male man as his inheritance governed her woman's mind, and silenced it. If her parting now from Oliver—supposing she could achieve it—was to endanger the object she had in view in marrying him, what had she gained by her marriage? Besides, it was certainly true that Dr. Phinehas was very fond of money. Was it not possible Oliver was right about the old man's motives for retaining him so long in hospital?

So Lucinda, after wavering awhile, consented to ride next day with her husband to Croxley, without admitting to herself any change in her final purpose. She was suffering from a torment of conscience at war with inclination, for her mere human impulse was towards Oliver. And this was strengthened by his evident determination to keep her, even while she revolted against his assumption of power. He loved her still, somehow; and how much that meant! She might have suspected her own heart, from the readiness with which she accepted his suggestion that her child's legitimacy would be flawed by her leaving him while it was all such guesswork about its birth. Anyhow, her final conclusion was compliance with his wishes, until she could lighten the burden of her father's death by leaving him, without fear for the future of a babe unborn.

She might have suspected, too, that she had softened towards Oliver from her growing tendency to dwell more and more on her own sin as the real underlying cause of her father's death. How weak and wicked she had been!—her only poor excuse being that she had never more than half-grasped the nature of her own actions.

No—she would bear this life a little yet to make a foothold in the world for that baby. Her decision was helped by a thought she never dared to think out: “Had my father slain my lover, could I have lived with *him* after?” And though she varied the question “Could I not?” she had no heart to answer “Yes.”

## CHAPTER XXII

HAD John Rackham been in favour with Sir Oliver, no doubt he would have been sent for to the Old Hall to be in close attendance on him, as we have seen him before. But his revelation of the story of the duel, whether through witchcraft or otherwise, had thrown him into such disgrace with his master, that when Vincent, acting on his sister's suggestion, proposed that he should be summoned from Croxley, Sir Oliver declined the offer, not overcourteously. "What the devil should the knave come here for?" said he. So Rackham remained at Croxley, riding over once to inquire concerning his master's progress; and once, on the occasion of the wedding, when the recognition of his appearance was too scant to encourage him to do the same thing again. Not only was this so, but, to add to his grievance, the young groom was sent for in his stead, leaving him sole tenant of the stable quarter at Croxley Hall.

As at Kips Manor, Rackham spent almost the whole of his life in the stable-yard by day, and at night locked himself into his own den, leaving a dog or two unchained to give a first reception to intruders. He seldom did this until after the household were asleep, or well on their way to sleep. Now and again it would be long past midnight before he thought fit to retire. It was so on the last night but two before Oliver's return to Croxley, with his new-made wife.

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ball for one of his horses, and that had thrown all his work behindhand. It was the young colt that had carried Lucinda so well on her bad journey from Kips Manor; that, giving out in the end, had been left with the host of the Three Sheaves, about four miles off, and sent on by him, as instructed by Lucinda, to the New Hall next day. On this evening it had begun showing inexplicable symptoms, shivering and starting, and leaving the oats in its manger untouched. Its breath came short, too, and was hot, and altogether its condition puzzled the groom, who thereon resorted to a special time-honoured concoction, known only to himself and his father before him, but requiring great care in the mixing and composition of the ingredients. Had the horse not been in its own stable, at the New Hall, he might have thought it bewitched, as before; but Rackham could not conceive of any witch so bold as to molest a horse in such a sacred surrounding. It would be all right after it had swallowed his panacea. But he could not expect any effect for a few hours yet. So he went to bed.

The rain had lulled an hour since, but there was more in the sky to come down; so he had said as he locked the stable-door. A moon near the full, rim-blurred through the mist, and halo-circled, made the same prediction. But its fulfilment was delayed; for the mist grew less, and the moon brighter, and Rackham could see by its light a woman's figure near the turn in the road, a hundred yards away. An unusual sight, long after midnight! So unusual, that a superstitious man, not more than half awake, would have thought it a ghost, past doubt. The groom was neither, so he rolled himself up to sleep unconcerned. She was no affair of his, whoever she was.



The dogs broke out in a chorus directly after. Well!—they would do that till the wanderer had passed the house. Rackham remained unconcerned, and continued the arrangement of his attitude. It was to outlast daybreak.

But the dog-chorus did not die down as he expected, and he had cursed the beasts twice or three times for an excess of duty, when an unwelcome sound broke through his reluctance to move—the jangle of the gate-bell, loud and sudden in the silence. It left him no choice but to get up and look from the door in the gable of the adjoining loft, that opened on space, and showed to him who cared to risk a fall out, a partial view of one outside the gate. This one was a woman, Rackham thought; obviously the one he had just seen along the road.

“Be off!” shouted he to the disturber. He was so utterly convinced that she *could* not be any concern of his or anyone in the house—probably a wandering lunatic—that he had no scruple about his form of speech, so far. But he softened it down, adding, “Who be you? No good, I warrant!”—the last to himself partly.

“Come down, Master Rackham,” answered a voice he knew. He was half-prepared for the name that followed, spoken as though the speaker took recognition for granted: “Susan Trant.”

His anticipation of it was not so clear, though, as to intercept a long, low whistle, and “My word!” But he would go to the gate; that he settled on promptly. One or two garments had to be supplied or adjusted. So he said, “Bide till I come,” and went back to his kennel for the purpose.

The story tried to hint, some while since, that Rackham’s sentiments towards Mrs. Trant were not unmixed with a certain vulgar appreciation. This had been marred

or thwarted for a time by his resentment against the thralldom he had endured at her hands. But this resentment had abated after he had helped to hand her over to the rack or the stake. He was even with her; so his mind phrased it. At any rate, it had now become easier to forgive her, and to go back to an estimation of her personal charms akin to his recognition of the points of a fine mare. So that as he found his way down the ladder that led from his dormitory, he was nursing an image in his mind, mainly founded on that of Mistress Trant when she spoke to him through the window of Kips Manor, while she was still beguiling him into her spider's web. This image was a tempting one, and his anticipation as he threw the gate open was very different from its fulfilment.

Haggard, stooping, soiled, and splashed with dirt from head to foot, limping as she walked, and seeming like to fall, with some indistinct damage on her face that Rackham could not define in the dim light, the woman that met his eyes was a greater contrast to the image he expected than his slow mind could assimilate. "You lie, whoever you be, mistress!" said he. "You've gotten the voice of her, too," he added. "Come you in." But he found it hard to believe that this was truly Susan Trant.

Whoever she was she staggered in across the yard. There was a truss of fresh hay and some sacks against the stable-door, and on these she sank down, leaning against the wall. It was plain she was faint to death; worn out, one would have said, with fatigue, hunger, rough usage, what not! She showed no apprehension of harm from the dogs, though their excitement seemed quite unusual. Rackham drove or kicked the free ones back into their

kennels, and chained them. Then he returned to the woman.

She tried for speech, saying—so thought her hearer—“They went nigh to killing me, Master Rackham.” But he could not have sworn to the words.

He was at a loss, but could take his own time to work it out. Presently he bethought himself of a bottle of true Irish usquebaugh, treasured for gradual consumption. He could spare a mouthful, at a pinch. Apart from all other considerations, he did not want this woman to die on his hands.

The usquebaugh was effectual, and she spoke, saying: “I have scarce tasted food this day.” Rackham brought her whatever scraps he could lay hands on, rough fare enough, but she devoured it as one famished. Then she got speech, and began to tell him how she had come afoot all the way from Bury, walking for eight whole days, having escaped from persecutors; and other matters more or less confused, of which even had he been a shrewder hearer, he could have made but little. Sleep was coming on her apace; seeing which, and being well-disposed towards sleep himself, Mr. Rackham cast about to extemporise a rough bed in an empty stall of the stable, of fresh hay and a sack of oats for a pillow. “Lie thee down and snore, mistress,” said he, throwing her a horse-cloth for counterpane, and then found his way up his ladder and slept himself.

When he awoke, well on into daylight, he was half inclined to believe he had dreamt it all. But then, there was the woman, who he could now see *was* Susan Trant, as he looked out over the stable-yard and saw her, afoot before himself, moving with a limp, and seeming to peer about, to catch a sight of the house, of which the main

portion was not fully visible from the stables, which were under the side wall.

"I see it be you, now, mistress, pretty plain," said he, when he got within word-distance of her. "But someone has made free with your nose, or my eyesight's tripping me up." For he saw now what it was that had struck him as strange about her face in the half-dark. The nose had been badly cut, and the wound had healed ill, and meant to leave a bad scar.

The woman's answer seemed to take its hearer's understanding of the case for granted. "A good housewife helped me after I got away from them," said she. "She strapped the cut with a plaster. I took it off but yesterday. 'Tis a wonder to me it should have healed at all. . . . Yes—Master Rackham, I am hungry and sore, and a good breakfast would be a glad sight."

The groom asked no more questions then, having a slow instinct that he would hear the tale better later. He went away to provide the breakfast, and how he contrived to get it is not clear. But this was not the first time he had applied to the housekeeper to provide for an unexpected inmate; and if any of the household had seen that this inmate was a woman, it would only have led to a discreet avoidance of the stables; such discretion having been an understood practice in Sir Oliver's time at the New Hall. However, of course, it is possible that the rough plenty of the great house could ignore so small an additional demand as two or three new-laid eggs and an extra rasher or two of bacon. As for small beer, which was the early morning drink of that time, none ever counted its quantity or cost. All this was well for Susan Trant, who in an hour's time was able to make her story clear, and account for her unexpected appearance.

The substance of it is all that is needed here, the actual telling being often broken, and interspersed with explanations. She had been haled before the Justices at Bury, on the information, as she had since learned, of Sir Oliver Raydon, and of John Rackham himself, whose share in the matter she seemed to slur over, with a kind of suggestion that he had acted under orders, and was the merest subordinate. "It was not my desert at your hands, Master Rackham," said she. "But your word was at the bidding of another, and well do I know where the blame lies." At her first examination she had given herself up for lost, seeing her guilt was taken for granted except she could prove her innocence; as was common in witch-trials, the offenders being almost always women, and not entitled to the benefit of a nicety of Law that holds men innocent until they can be proved guilty. But during her detention in the common gaol—for, of course, if any bail had been forthcoming it would have been refused—she turned over in her mind, as one desperate might do, all manner of devices to escape the penalties she knew awaited her. For, except she could find a better, her only chance would be that she should remain alive under water; seeing that if she floated on the surface, she would afterwards be burnt at the stake, as hundreds had been before her. The end of which cogitation was, that at her second examination this Susan, being called on to confess, did so with much show of contrition, giving many and amazing details of her temptation by the Evil One, in the form of a little man with crop-ears, and a sweet voice, and how he had prevailed upon her to let him suck her blood, though but a little quantity, in exchange for an owteh of black jet, that is to say, a trinket, which had great and magic



virtues, and would give her power over all who should handle it. Whereat the Judge having inquired of her was this the toy wherewith she had so besotted Mr. John Rackham, in the service of the worshipful Sir Oliver Raydon, she had replied "Yes," and that she had it upon her now, and his lordship might handle it, and see his face in it if he cared to look. But whether its old virtue were in it still, that she could not say, seeing that very like the little man with the crop-ears might be angered against her now she had betrayed him.

His lordship, however, would have none of it himself, but ordered the Clerk of the Court to examine it, and take charge of it as a necessary evidence; who, being in great terror to touch it—for had it not been handled by the Evil One himself?—was fain to protest against being compelled to do so, having a family of twelve children, and a third wife expecting in November. So he made this petition to the Court, that before he was compelled to take this Satan's trinket in his charge, it should be handled by the Very Reverend the Dean of St. Mary's, who was then present, by virtue of whose holy office the evil spirit would surely make but a short stay therein, leaving it innocuous to a mere layman like himself. Which being granted, and the Reverend Dean having discerned in the locket no more than any other female gaud or fairing, only that it showed his face amiss for all it was so polished, the learned Judge was of a mind to examine it himself, and did so. Thereon each man then in Court—and many were folk of weight and condition—would take his turn to look into this piece of polished jet, and each in turn said what the Reverend Dean had said, that the reflection mirrored in it showed his face askew, however clear it made his features. And one



made a deft turn with his finger, to show the manner of this twist. Then says Mistress Susan, with due apology and humble reverence to the worshipful Court and the Very Reverend Dean, that so had John Rackham said, and she rejoiced thereat, for surely now he would die too, if she should be sent to the scaffold or the stake.

On hearing this strange speech, the learned Judge directed that it should be entered on the minutes, and further required the accused to explain her meaning, and not dally with the patience of the Court. For if she did so, she should surely be rackt, or at the least well pricked with pins for to bring her to some reason.

But Susan was ready with her explanation, saying that now she would withhold nothing, to show her true repentance. And her meaning was easy to tell, being simply that there was a virtue of prediction in this insignificant piece of polished jet, whereby it should be known whether its owner, or any chance person who looked at his image therein, should live the longer. But, said his lordship the Judge, by what token should this be known? How could *she* know that Mr. Rackham's decease would follow on her execution, which she heartily deserved, if only for her unchristian rejoicing over the death of an unoffending man, who had told no more than the truth, by her own showing. Thereupon Susan shed tears, saying his lordship had most clearly the right of it, and taking great blame to herself that she had so spoken in haste. For it was her Christian wish to die at peace with all men, and make amends for her many yieldings to the instigation of this cunning Satan. She ought rather to pray that John Rackham might live, but in truth she feared that nothing could altogether remove

the inward powers of the stone, not even the touch of the most worshipful and reverend Dean. She only spoke what she understood the little crop-eared man to say—that he who saw his face atwist to the left would die of a certainty, within but a few days of herself. But he whose face was set askew to the right might enjoy long life, whether she should die or live.

Then the Reverend Dean and my lord the Judge both went very pale, and spoke uneasily. And others in the Court who had looked in this piece of jet would look in it again, though each accounted the woman but a liar, seeking to frighten them. The end of it was, after much discussion, in which the Reverend Dean used all his powers of persuasion with the Court to get this witch let off scot-free, in view of her evident repentance and turning from the paths of Satan, that Mrs. Trant was liberated, undertaking with many tears and much show of contrition, to lead a godly life and shun the Black Art, and all the wiles of the Evil One.

At this point Rackham interrupted the story, which had taken time in the telling, to say: “But this was all a damned lie, I’ll pound it, Mistress Susan.”

To which Susan answered: “’Twas a lie, as you say. But it did me a good turn, though it would have been a better one had they opened their doors to me when all the neighbours were abed. For the town was against me, and I tell you this for a truth, Master Rackham, that when I came forth of the gaol-door that opens on the market, there by the cross in the middle was a crowd of folk a-listening to a godly minister of religion, who was preaching a discourse touching the commandment of our Lord, ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.’ And no sooner had they sight of me—just a poor woman, all

alone, for none of my kith had the courage to stand by me . . .”

“Your good man, mistress,” Rackham interposed, “seems to have played mighty small in the matter. Stopped at home, I lay.”

Susan broke into a bitter laugh. “He might have done so, Master Rackham, for all the good he ever did me! Why—when he was asked a question, what does he answer? Says he believes he wedded me through some witch-poison I put in his drink. The liar!—he wedded me for two hundred pounds out of the pocket of the Squire’s mother, she that gave me this cloak I carry now—’tis a marvel for wear, for ’tis none so bad to look on even now, after eighteen years gone. . . .”

But Rackham’s wits could not follow digressions. “You see ’em a-coming, mistress,” said he. “I understood you to say so, by your words.”

“Yes—I saw them coming, all shouting to kill the witch—kill the witch! It was the worst bout of it all. They were just so many devils broke loose. I can only half-say what happened. I heard one shout, ‘Slit her nose o’ both sides!’ but I could not have sworn to the doing of it, for the life of me. Who’s to say what comes about when she can see no way out of Hell, look where she may? All the thought I could have was for what might come next. . . .”

“And what come next?” said Rackham. For the speaker had paused, with the horror of the memory upon her face, as though the telling of it was beyond her powers of speech.

“The next I know, to tell clearly, was that two men had me by the arm, one each side, and were walking me along the road out of the town. One told me the end

of it. The Justices had no mind I should be killed, and stopped the riot. But they would not have me in the town, and these two were to see me well on my way, and turn me loose to make shift for myself. One of them I knew from a boy. But he thought me a witch, and his heart was hardened."

"But what money had you, mistress?"

"Not a penny—they had taken it all. But the Reverend Dean had sent me a crown, being unwilling I should starve outright. And the little brooch they sent me back too, being mightily afeared of it, and even afeared to destroy it."

She then described how the officers of the Court had been only just in time to save her from the mob, one of whom had a tale to tell of how the nose of a witch being fairly slit of both sides, her powers for mischief would be gone for good. And thus it was that when these officers left her she, finding all her bosom bloodstained, and guessing the nature of her wound from the pain of it, went to seek for help at a cottage, saying she had fallen and was badly hurt. The goodwife at this cottage, being kindly-hearted, not only tended the cut, strapping it together with a plaster, but kept her in her cottage a day, giving her time for rest, which she needed all the more that her leg was lame from a bad kick, given in the crowd. After which she went on her way, having made up her mind to seek Sir Oliver at his own home, though with what intent was outside John Rackham's powers of surmise. He presumed that Mrs. Trant knew her own business best.

She had not been at any loss to find her way, having often heard tell of the wayside places betwixt Kips Manor and Croxley, and the crown the Dean sent her was enough

to stave off exhaustion by hunger. But she had to beg shelter, sometimes in barns; and once she had slept beneath the sky, in the warmth of a brick-kiln. She was near the end of her strength when she arrived at the New Hall, having learned the description of it from the host of the Three Sheaves, four miles off.

"And now you've got here, mistress, what be you thinking to do?" So spoke Mr. Rackham, adding: "I can't have you here—that you'll understand without telling."

"Oh, Mr. Rackham, how can you think I would thrust myself on you! 'Twould be unseemly. No—no! So soon as Sir Oliver is out of bed, which I take it will not be long now, I will go to him, and make my petition to be allowed to remain on in the house, and be of what service I may. 'Twas too late last night, and they said at the Three Sheaves where I should find Master Rackham."

"Sir Oliver is away. And if he comes back, mistress, I doubt he won't be best pleased at the sight of you. And so I tell you."

"Best pleased at the sight of me?" She laughed a low laugh, uncomfortable to hear. But John Rackham was not impressionable. She went on: "Why—he thinks me safe in gaol!" Then she made as though she was ready for a greater confidence, going nearer and speaking lower. "You might not think it, but there was a time when Squire Raydon—I mean Sir Oliver—would have laughed to be told he would want *me* burned or hanged. He was a devil to me, but 'twas another sort of devil." Her voice dropped almost to a whisper, and her hearer was aware that all this was not without its gratification for him. It tickled him in some way not quite definable, except in so far as it implied mere homage to his vanity. But

any coarse man licks his lips over an insight into a woman's story, told by herself.

He beamed with reciprocity and understanding. A wrinkle towards a half-closed eye helped, and a knee-slap added emphasis to "*Wouldn't I have thought it? Odscockles, Mistress Susan, I've said it myself, over and again ere now. To think of that now—you and Master Oliver! But he was a rare one.*" He dwelt upon his young master's gay career of glorious wickedness with a noisome glee, not altogether unpaternal. Then he laughed till the tears came, saying piecemeal: "*He's a sad rogue—he's a woundy rogue—among the girls! But they can't resist 'un. Catch they!*"

"Do you think I have much love for him now, Mr. Rackham? Not overmuch. But did you say he was not here now?" Then it was the man's turn to tell the tale of what had happened to Sir Oliver since his return, but he was not so glib with it, and it did not seem a source of pleasure to Mrs. Trant, except it were the part that related to his second duel, and his narrow escape from death. The story of his marriage brought an angry flush to her face, teeth clenched for a moment, and a knitted brow. The anger of true jealousy outlives all its allied conditions and interests. Susan had now nothing to gain or lose by any change in Sir Oliver's surroundings, yet she felt a new pang of anger at his actual marriage with Lucinda. Her consolation for her own lot had always been that the victims who followed her had fared no better than she. Why was this one to score a success?

Rackham grinned at the visible signs on her face of the storm within, and said: "*You'll maybe get a chance to give the master a bit of your mind to-day or to-morrow, Mistress Susan. I take it, not unlikely he's on his way*



here. That young man you see at Kips . . . Oh—gone before you came, had he! . . . well, he rode over yesterday to tell Dame Cecily the master was coming—him and Lady Raydon. Ah—Lady Raydon in earnest now!”

The woman’s eyes rested shrewdly on him a moment, and then she seemed to consider, and finally to adopt some resolution. A tone of cajolery came back to her, as she said: “Come now, Master Rackham, you’ll never say you believed all that tale you told the magistrates. It was put upon you to say it.”

Rackham fired up. “*What* will I never say? Why—plague take it all, Mistress Susan, are *you* going to say a word of it was false? Who set me down to stare my eyes out at a cursed little jiggumbob with a devil in it? Who shut ’em up tight for me whether I would or no? Who set me on to blabbing Master Oliver’s affairs?” For he used, speaking hotly, the name his inner soul always gave to his employer.

Susan, despite of her nose, could be scornful still, with those two green eyes to help her, watching for the dawn of new embarrassment in Mr. Rackham’s mind. “If men are such fools as to believe all one tells them, what’s to make them wiser? Just think of that silly rooster-cock with a chalk line down his beak! Why does it stick so tight to the barn-floor? Dost think the Devil comes to hold it down, John Rackham? Not he!—no more than he came to shut thine eyes, silly man! He has other matter on hand than that, trust him! No—no; the bird’s a fool, and there’s the whole of his story. And thou art a fool, and that’s the whole of thine.” She spoke to the old man as to a child of ten.

Rackham, speechless with indignation at first, found his voice at last in spite of the gaze fixed on him.

sort of way, and went closer, to help in looking in to see. Rackham would have met this with some vulgar familiarity had he been a bit younger, and she any easy young Moll or Betsy of his early days. But the truth is he was afraid of her. Not, however, to the extent of shrinking from her proximity; quite the reverse! He rather maintained his inspection the longer for it, as a satisfaction he could appreciate, provided it committed him to nothing.

It was ill for him that he did so. For while he was still trying to decide what way the reflection warped his features, a drowsy fit—or something that resembled one, yet left him broad awake—came over him. But his eyesight did not serve him well, for it was only by a sense of touch that he knew that the woman drew her hands down each side of his face, which was far from unpleasant to him. He accepted her doing so as reasonable, but could not guess why he did so. Because he knew perfectly well, look you, that it was *unreasonable*!

Neither did he at the moment question her half-singing, half-saying a sort of song or rhyme that was surely gibberish, yet seemed plausible too—somehow applicable to themselves and something undefined, that spun round. However strange it may seem, that most nearly describes his consciousness of something that he knew had happened when, coming as it were to himself, he heard Mrs. Trant say, plain enough: “We shall do now. . . . You see, Master Rackham, ’tis as I told you—no harm in it at all! Now give it me back.” And then felt her take the brooch from his hand. Then he felt curious about what had happened.

“What was you a-singing of to yourself?” . . .

“When?”

"But now. A minute ago." He seemed suspicious.

"Oh—that! 'Three thick thimbles.' That is naught."

"Ay!—but what is it?"

"Just a lilt of the nursery. The children sing it. . . . Why did I? Sheer idleness of tongue, I take it. Why should I not?"

"'Twas none of your bedevilments?"

"Out upon it, Master Rackham! You're just besotted with your fancies. Is it like I should play off any tricks on you—a poor weak woman alone here!"

"I wouldn't trust ye, mistress." He seemed nevertheless a little disturbed by the song-incident, and went away abruptly, saying "I have gotten a sick horse to see to."

If, as it would appear from all this, Mrs. Trant had a second time bewitched her victim, no visible result came from it that day, unless it were that the groom showed a singular docility, assenting easily to her remaining at the stables, and complying with all her wishes, although some of them were capricious enough, and whimsical. The story is silent as to any other influences she may have brought to bear—many such may be imagined—and seems to imply that these enchantments were fruits of the Black Art, not such as are every-day occurrences. Some of her most reasonable requirements, too, were those most difficult to satisfy; as, for instance, her desire to replace the garments she had on with others, fresh and unsoiled. How Rackham came by some he provided her with does not appear, nor is it important to know it, but the fact that he did so shows how completely he had again come under her sway, magical or otherwise. His compliance with demands less reasonable shows this even more convincingly. As, for instance, when on the second day of

her sojourn with him, after sunset, she says to him: "Master Rackham, open me the door through into the garden. I have a mind to see the big yellow moon off the terrace. Here the stable hides it."

"That door never be opened, Mistress Sukey." He was conscious of his subjection, but fitfully in revolt against it. And the keeping of this door closed was a kind of chronic religious observance with him. He had only opened it once in eighteen years, on the morning when Sir Oliver came back from the duel.

"You will open it for me, Master Rackham."

"'Tis no use asking me, mistress. That door never *be* opened."

"I did not ask thee, good John." She spoke to him more than ever as to a child. "I did but say you would open it, whether I asked it or no! Bide in patience, and see if it do not prove so." And she says not a word more, but sits on, taking no heed of his grunted negative, her green eyes fixed on him. It is strange to watch their effect, as the free bird is said to flutter to the serpent's jaws, trapped by his cold, persistent gaze. She seems content to wait. He will do it in the end.

Presently he speaks: "I'll be damned or ever I open yon door, for thou or any woman," says he. To which she replies, unmoved: "You will do it ere then, I take it, Master Rackham. Not very long hence. Time enough for me to see the yellow moonrise." He grunts again, as one who says defiantly, "We shall see!"

But strange to say, in a little while his fingers itch to take a bunch of keys from the pocket of a coat that hangs on a nail by the little stable window—for it was there this conversation took place—and it is to him like some chance irritation of the skin that one may make oath against

touching or rubbing, but that is ever victorious in the end. He has to look for those keys, will he nill he. Having found them, he goes up his ladder, and taking from a locker a larger key, returns with it down the ladder, muttering to himself at intervals.

But Susan Trant says never a word more, seeming still content to wait, until he actually goes out, key in hand, to all seeming to do her bidding. Then she takes from a hook where she has hung it her cloak with the hood that was the gift of the Squire's mother, and follows him out, going towards that garden door. The kick she got in the crowd has still its effect on her gait, and she goes with a limp.

Rackham had the key in the door as she approached him. He turned to her as he opened it, saying: "What tale shall you tell to Dame Langdon if you meet her? Ah!—or to ere a one of them, for that matter?" To which she replied: "That concerns me, Master Rackham. Draw water in your own pail; leave me mine."

He had stood a moment wondering what could have possessed him to act thus—to depart from a time-honoured usage at the whim of such a woman as this—when his ear was caught by the sound of horses' feet. He had a keen ear for the footstep of a horse, and he would have sworn that was Alcibiades, Sir Oliver's roan, that he rode away on six weeks ago. Now, although he did not closely analyse why it was that he was so unwilling Sir Oliver should meet Susan Trant face to face, he was sure he would be glad to get her out of the way, provisionally. But when he tried to follow her through the open door, he found he could not. He stood with his feet glued to the ground, unable to stir from the spot.

Presently, back she comes; locks the door and slips the

key in her pocket. "Where's the need to stand there looking like a fool?" says she curtly, but with an under-laugh at his expense. "There's the master and her ladyship—her new ladyship—coming along the lane a-horseback. See you be ready to receive them." Then she goes straightway up the ladder, and hides herself in Rackham's bedroom, where certainly none will come to look for her.

As she goes, he comes to himself, with occasional grunts of astonishment, and a disposition to slap his limbs and examine his hands, as though he needed tangible evidence of his own existence. The sound of hoofs comes nearer, and the voices of the riders. What's that her ladyship is saying?

"Woman on the terrace, sweetheart? What woman? You'll turn all the milk sour, Oliver mine, if you look like that. What's all the to-do? Why not a woman on the terrace?"

But Oliver pays no attention to Lucinda's rally. He is knocking at the stable gate with the butt-end of his whip. "Where's that lazy knave, John Rackham? . . . Ho—there you are—Master John! Who's yonder woman on the terrace? . . . None of your lies—I *saw* her!" By now, the gate is open, and the young groom, who has ridden up from the rear, is dismounting Lucinda.

"If there's e'er a woman there, Master Oliver," says Rackham slowly, "she's one I know nowt about, except she be Dame Langdon or one of the serving wenches. It be they—one or other on 'em!"

Oliver is seriously disquieted about this woman, and Lucinda cannot see why. Had it not been for catching sight of her, Oliver would no doubt have passed the stables, and ridden on to the house-door to dismount—a



more ceremonial home-coming for such an occasion. Now he is off his horse, and throwing the rein carelessly to the young groom, strides into the stable-yard, calling for the key of the door—the key of the door! Get him the key of the door at once!

Rackham dares not venture on an attempt to recover the key from Mrs. Trant, for the window of his den where she has hidden herself opens just above the door in the garden wall, and every word would be audible to Sir Oliver and Lucinda, waiting for his return to open it. So he makes a pretence to hunt for it in the stable itself. Oliver and Lucinda suppose themselves alone, and speak freely.

“Crazy Oliver!” says she. “Let the woman be! One of the maids, or Joan Cockerell, the gardener’s wife. Why such a to-do?”

“Old Joan! As if I should not know old Joan! No, no!—this is some trick, or the Devil’s in it.”

“What *can* you mean, Oliver?” She speaks seriously, for she is always haunted by that fear about his brain.

“I suppose it’s that infernal dream I dreamt . . . yes—I told you once, I know. A damned dream about my mother—rest her soul!—on the terrace here, limping along. She limped, you know. . . . But I told you of it? . . .” And then, John Rackham coming back with some tale of why he could not at the moment lay hands on the key, he rated him well for his carelessness, and of course Lucinda asked no more about the dream and the figure of the woman on the terrace.

But every word they had said together had been heard and marked by Susan Trant in the room over the stable, quite close to them.

## CHAPTER XXIII

THOSE who have lived under extreme tension, knowing that some great predominating misery fills their lives—losing it, if ever, only in sleep; waking to it always in the raw cold daylight—these know, too, how the actual we have to face thrusts its petty claims upon us, and will be heard, even though we stop our ears against it. So, for the moment, when the man Lucinda loved and hated had his foot on the stirrup for the first time since his trial of strength with Death, her thought was, “Will he bear it? Is he safe?” For he was still Oliver, with it all! Love outbid Hate, for that moment; and then, when she saw him safe, or seeming so, gave place again to the ever-present imaginings that shadowed her heart and made her life funereal. Was not this the Old Hall, her home; with, as Oliver had said, a memory of her father in every room, an echo of his voice in every sound? And who, she asked herself again and again, was the more guilty of his death—she or Oliver? She had called her lover *murderer*; had *she* the right to brand that name upon him? At least, she should share it with him—share the burden of a penitence she hoped might be his one day; praying daily, as she did, that a time would come when his evil deed would lie less light upon his soul.

For, in truth, one thing that made her lot hardest to bear was Oliver’s equanimity; it was but too plain that the panoply of a worldly morality shielded him; kept conscience at bay, sheltered his heart unstung, and let it

harden in security. Yet may it not have been that his guilt was really less than hers; for, after all—what course had been open to him? She was sufficiently imbued with the ideas of her time to regard the refusal of a challenge as impossible in practice. And might not his plea be allowed weight, that his action had been forced upon him by the skill of his opponent. Yes—he may have, must have, meant to end a bloodless duel by some shift that would yield a satisfaction to honour, and even build a bridge for reconciliation. But her father's sword, and his determination, were too strong for that.

Had Oliver fallen and her father lived, to plead for pardon for the slaying of her lover, would he not have had to confess that it was he that had provoked the duel, not Oliver? It was a thought always more or less in her mind, and very strongly now as she rode away beside him, with the consciousness also upon her of the vows she had spoken to him but a month since, believing always she should never bring herself to observe them. Then, again—look at this: had Oliver but come to her with the fresh stain of blood upon his hands—had he confessed all and thrown himself on her mercy—then how infinitely stronger that plea would have been, that only a narrow chance had made him the survivor!

So long as she was in her old home, Lucinda could see nothing in this plea but a mere law quibble, an evasion. She could not split straws over her father's grave—could admit no question of his conduct. But as she and her companion drew away to the open down, and left the Old Hall and her childhood behind, she was able at least to admit the thought that she herself was answerable for his death as much as her husband. Her conduct had left him no choice, in her brother's absence. It was

purely a question of honour against dishonor. And her course of action had been of her own choosing; no compulsion had been put upon her. It was all honest, straightforward guile on Oliver's part. Things were held fair in love that are held treachery in war; but, then, consider—women are only women, when all is said.

At least, Oliver had made such amends as he could, such as would be judged so by the same Court that defines Sin, and damns it. Need she, this being so, stifle a feeling akin to gladness that he rode so straight, never flinching at the movement of his horse, seeming to give the lie to all Dr. Phinehas's gloomy forebodings? It was no disloyalty to a beloved memory, surely, to grant to Oliver as much of concession and pardon as she would have granted to her father himself had the position of the two men been reversed.

The young groom, dispatched the day after that on which we last saw Oliver and Lucinda, to give notice of their arrival at Croxley the same evening, was a premature herald. For Dr. Phinehas was so urgent that one more day at least should be given to absolute rest, that Sir Oliver made that much concession grudgingly. The morning after saw the newly-wedded, but previously married, couple—surely the best description of the fact?—on their way back to their future home. They were alone; their only escort, the same young groom, having left them a mile from the house, to take another route as far as the Abbey, where he was to rejoin them.

There is nothing that stirs life to exultation more than the rhythmic lift of the horse's body beneath its rider; the rejoicing of the creature in its speed and power is a thing irresistible. Even the strong swimmer that breasts the light ripple of the sea-waves in the morning sunshine,

and forgets the land in the splendour of his freedom, is not more divinely intoxicated with the joy of living than the rider at one with his horse on some long stretch of level golden sand, or smooth sound slopes the flocks have cropped to sheer perfection while generations lived and died. Who can resist it, when a whispered suggestion of the bridle sends the glorious creature that bears him hot-foot across the glorious land, through the sweet air the skylarks fill with music above, striking responsive music from the sweet heart of the turf below? It was not in Lucinda to feel no healing to her wounded soul, no counter-stress to her misery in such a new-found exultation; with all her youth to back her, and a love she could not quench for the man who rode beside her still poisoning—if you will have it so—the sources of her being.

And yet, when he and she reined in their steeds at the end of a scour across the down she could not but exult in, she felt disloyal to the dead!

If the dead are a memory and no more, what is their profit from the lamentations of their survivors, each bound to take his turn of Death in the end? But if those lamentations reach them still, powerless to make us hear their voices, may not every tear we shed count only to their loss?—add only to the bitterness of an enforced silence? Such a thought would have seemed to Lucinda an aggravation of disloyalty, and she shut the door of her mind against it. But it hung about the threshold.

It was not the only plea in waiting there, on the watch to unsettle her resolution to remain with Oliver no longer than was needed to gain her end. It had been easy to put aside their unexplained talk about her supposed forgiveness by saying it was an hallucination of Oliver's, and calling in Susan Trant's necromancies to help. But it

was hard to believe it heart-whole. May not she herself have said something to warrant the delusion, or produce it? Could she be sure of anything she said or did in so terrible a time?

Anyhow, her bewilderment at this story came back to her as they went slowly, slowly, down the steep descent above the old bridge that the floods had spared for centuries in the face of prophesied disaster. It became unendurable as she dwelt upon the man beside her, and tried to see in him the victim of hallucination. How conceive it, now that nothing was there to suggest the malady that might have touched his brain? But so it often is, with epilepsy, health and strength remaining unimpaired in the intervals of the attacks. How else could Julius Cæsar, who is said to have suffered thus, have won and kept sway of the whole world in such intervals except they found him free?

And yet . . . how about the moment close following upon an attack? Her lover's was so recent, that time at Kips. The fit had but just left him. . . . Yes—it may have been an arrant delusion. But . . .

She could not bear the speculative conflict in her mind, and spoke suddenly. "Oliver! What *was* it?" For she forgot that he knew nothing of her thought.

"What was what?" said he.

"What was it that made you think I had forgotten. . . . I mean, that made you tell me that tale of—of—my hand and the rings?" She chose what she remembered best, for identification.

"Faith! I'll be hanged if I know. 'Twas a true tale, for my own part in it, and that's the most I can tell you, Lucy mine!"

"Then you really believed . . . ?"



"Believed it was you? That's so, right enough. And you believed it was me, at the time."

"Oh, Oliver!—what a foolish speech! *I was not there.* I was past Merrows Camp before the storm came. There were just a few big drops of rain when Rackham and I rode away, but all the storm was over the sea—black. And yet you say that there was I—my hand and my rings—when all the rain had stopped. Do think upon it, Oliver!"

"Where's the good to come of thinking, silly wench? 'Twas only there in the seeming of it, and we shall never be the nearer, think how we may! But 'twas all one, for the upshot. Call it a dream if you will—it was a dream that made for my acquittal, and a welcome fantasy enough. I would it had been true, Lucy, for thy sake and mine. . . . What, girl!—why did I say nothing of it that day in the garden? Indeed, I might have done so, Lucy mine, had it not been for that clout on the head. . . ."

"Oh, think of the provocation, Oliver. But I was wild and beside myself, and, indeed, I only half knew what I did. Forgive me that!"

But Oliver made light of the blow Lucinda had given him—had only a laugh for it. "Thou shalt do it again, my girl," said he, "and I shall deserve it." The more easily he took it, the nearer he came to her old ideal of him. The readier he was to overlook this mere trifle in her treatment of himself, the more she suspected her inner soul of nursing overmuch resentment for a death that might well have been his own. Think what turned on the slip of a steel point, one way or the other. And then, also, what would she have felt towards her brother had her husband's late wound been from *his* weapon, not a wild

mischance of Oliver's? Yet Vincent had a double justification.

But it is hopeless to follow all the movements in the war of irrepressible love and extinguishable resentment, of which Lucinda's soul was the battlefield. Human impulses fought on the side of her love for Oliver, while the memory of the dead interposed on the extinction of her anger against him. More and more she found solace in self-censure—was not the blame finally and really her own? But whether this was secretly dictated by a longing to justify her love for Oliver, and sanction it, who can say?

She can only be judged by her actions. She was very silent as they got gradually down the steep hillside; was silent but for a word or two of indifferent matter till they had crossed the bridge and passed beyond the mill, and were again in the lonely road that made a short cross-cut, for riders only, to Croxley Village and the New Hall. The cart-road was longer and less tempting to the feet of ridden horses.

At Ashen Mow, where is what is called the Giant's Tomb, she spoke out sudden again, "Oliver!" and he replied: "Oliver what?—Oliver why? Tell thy thought, my Lucy." He kept a yawn under, to say this.

"Did you believe—could you believe that I ever spoke those words to you? My father's death—think of it!"

He warmed to more interest. "Believe it? How could I doubt my own senses? Maybe the time and place have got wrong; but the words, girl, the words . . . No, no!—I heard you say the words, my Lucy, some time that night, if it was not then." He spoke with an earnestness unlike his everyday self and she could not but believe him truthful.

“And when you came to seek me that day in the garden, you were thinking all the while that the past might—might be forgotten?”

“Not with an entire confidence, dearest! But I had had my hopes of it—yes.” There was a growing tenderness in his voice; half-calculated, but half-genuine. At least, he had never known himself so earnest. It was this woman’s amazing charm. He had only to picture to himself some movement of hers, some change of face, to bid defiance to repentance of his marriage, and keep it at bay. There was no one like her.

“Oh, Oliver, it was hard on you—to think that, and then to have me do as I did!” His calculations had been right; his truthfulness a good investment. His soul is in the balance now, and his two selves at grips for the mastery. Which will have the best of it?

He thought a moment what was wisest to say. Forgive his policy—was it not a good ambition to seek to seem loving, just, contrite for wrong done? He decided on: “Forget it all, my Lucy! I would that all things had been otherwise. But he who meddles with a sword-point has to do with death; it cannot be else. For the meeting with thy father—well!—how could I avoid it? I was rash to think I could handle the matter, and bring all to a safe end. What wonder I could not find the heart or the tongue to tell of such a dire mischance? . . .” There he stopped, knowing he could not say more and leave all his crafty devices that followed without apology or explanation, which he would have found it hard to give. So he changed the current of his pleading, knowing all his argument, so far safe, might suffer wreck. What end was to be gained, said he—and his voice seemed true and earnest—by dwelling on what was past recall? His one great

crime that lay behind it all was his passion for Lucinda. Therein he was guilty, and his guilt was great. He had tried to stifle his love, but in vain. He should have fled from her, but he could not. He *had* fled from her, but her image had been ever present to him—and much more of the same sort, which none knew better how to word than he; all the hackneyed phrases he had used so often, for the ruin of so many dupes! In this he was a liar, for in the early days of their meeting he knew nothing of Love, the divinest of all passions, and was, indeed, no better than a man. And he knew that he was now using a knowledge *she* had taught him, to throw a false glamour over those early protestations. Yet is not this the least unlovable of the lies this story has heard him tell? At least, he had learned to love; and, for him who has learned that lesson, there is always hope, be he man or brute.

Be sure that this language, all that a woman loves best to hear, lost nothing from a warmth that made it ring truer now in his own ears as he uttered it than it did in those earlier days when it was at best the mere stock-in-trade of a man of pleasure, to be paid for in sterling gold from an unsuspecting heart. It came to Lucinda, in the bitter desert of her unhappiness, as a mirage of the Sahara that is all unlike the cheats that went before it; and is, this time for certain, sweet water and green fields. And even as the parched traveller welcomes it for the sheer joy of believing them true, so her soul welcomed what it had not the courage to doubt.

“Oh, Oliver—Oliver!” she cried out into the middle of his passionate discourse. “The crime was mine—the crime was mine! And, oh me!—the coward that I was, to shift the guilt on thee to spare myself! Oh, my love, it is I that should be asking you to pardon *me*. Pardon

me now, my dear, my dear, and help me to bear my life—for it is bitter to live and know . . . and know . . .” She shrank from saying roundly that she knew herself guilty of her father’s death.

Oliver flinched from the torrent of her remorse and self-accusation. But a woman’s fancies must be humoured. If, now, he could only think of something Biblical to say, solemnly! It would seal the compact of a peace negotiation—help the ship, as it were, into safe waters. Then there would be an end of this sort of thing. Was old Ralph the only man that had ever been killed in a duel?

One or two memories of Scripture floated hazily in Oliver’s mind. “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,” would sound well, but Oliver was uncertain of the context. Neither did it seem to him reassuring. “Joy in Heaven over the sinner that repenteth” was more so, but—he could not have said why!—it seemed somehow to disclaim his own guilt. No—that line would *not* be safe! Why not resort to mere sincerity? It would be the safest shift, surely!

“What—my Lucy! Art thou to answer for thy father’s death? Out upon it! No—no! Let him who sows reap. As to the guilt of it—to my thinking, the guilt lay in the crossing of swords at all. That was none of my provocation. Share and share alike, at least! Was *he* not to blame, as well as I? At any rate, dearest, it was no fault of thine.”

The sentry-scouts that flew, black across the Abbey Meadows, to tell their fellow-rooks that someone came, may have been tale-bearers, to the best of their cawing, of how the man’s horse and the woman’s, close abreast, had stood awhile so still the lips of either rider met the other’s,

and had outstayed as much as might be of a half-embrace, balked by but little distance. For these birds see and know, and tell their knowledge to those that have ears and can hear, though they waste but little speech in the telling of it.

Thus it was that the relations of this husband and wife had undergone a change in that short two hours' ride. Such a change that John Rackham, hearing their voices, as they rode up to the stable-gate, could never have guessed the strain there had been between them since their marriage a month since.

Lucinda remembered well enough Oliver's reference to his curious dream. But she remembered, too well, the occasion that brought him to speak of it. She would say nothing now to revive the recollection of that moment, and its terrible sequel.

But Oliver would not let the figure on the terrace be forgotten. He questioned all the women-servants, and could get no light on its identity. The hour fixed itself—it was when he rode up to the gate, or just before. If it was one of their own number, why not admit it? It was no contravention of any law of *his* making to go on the terrace. Why not tell the truth? But it was soon plain they *were* telling the truth. Evidently, none of them had been on the terrace, or knew anything of the matter.

“You *must* have been mistaken, dearest,” said Lucinda, not unwilling that the thing should be forgotten.

“Lucy mine, how could I be mistaken? I saw the terrace plain—through the gap in the yew-hedge. One sees through plain from the turn of the road. Come and look at it.” They were walking, a day later, about the



gardens and near paddocks of the Hall, and it was a three minutes' walk at most that he proposed.

"See now, Lucy," said he when they arrived. "She came along limping, just like that wretched nightmare dream." . . .

"How could you be sure of the limp, thus far off?"

"H'm!—I might be unsure about the limp. And I might be unsure about the cloak. But the woman was there, or I'm forsworn. And who the Devil was she?"

John Rackham, catechized, was uncommunicative. How could he know what was happening t'other side of a ten-foot wall? There might have been a rare company of wenches on the terrace for anything he could naysay. He suggested that the household were untruthful—that undefined conspiracy was afoot, to mislead. As to any woman having passed through his door—well!—the key was lost. You could see that for yourself. No light was thrown on the subject by Mr. Rackham. His manner, that of a reasonlessly unwilling witness, was put down by Oliver to constitutional obstinacy. Lucinda may have noticed its abnormal oddity, and her silence about it may have been due to her wish that the incident should be forgotten.

She was strangely happy during the next few days, seeing how tragic her life had been for so long. Her love for her husband was a reinstated infatuation, and he was cunning enough to know how to strengthen his case for absolution. Do not blame her! Think how glad we all are to make accommodations between choice and duty. Do not grudge her this little spell of sunshine and calm weather. It was not for long. Her father's memory, too, was ever with her, and Oliver was not slow to see that his interest lay in affecting a sincere admiration and regard

for the man he had slain. He was careful to seem to keep this back—to have it forced unwillingly from him. Thus it came out—one can see it!—how good and noble was this man's inner heart, how cruelly he had been entrapped by misadventure into an outward seeming of an assassin and a traitor. It was craft, but it was craft he half-believed honest, and it was the less ignoble seeing the end it was to gain. The tear was almost real that he talked himself into shedding over old Ralph, and the torrent it provoked from Lucinda came as a luxury of grief to a heart half-broken.

Meanwhile Susan Trant was safe in her haven of refuge. Whether her influence over the old groom whose domicile she had invaded was necromantic, and not of the sort that Holy Writ limits and defines, but does not forbid, is a question to which in after days some said yes, some no. If the latter alternative, the transgression was beyond doubt, for Trant the farmer was not trampled by a bull and gored to death till two years later. Probably all who knew anything of the witch-trial at Bury, and John Rackham's deposition against her, decided that this time, too, he was bewitched. For is it likely that a woman would intrigue with a man who had done her so ill a turn—and he an old groom of sixty? *He* was ready, no doubt; but, then, do not some say no man is ever so old he will not soften to a woman? . . . yes!—if she be not uncomely out of all reason.

The denial of the witchcraft in this case, and the ready acceptance of the other explanation, may be due to a proneness to discredit all supernatural causes in human affairs, or to an overstrung belief in the omnipresence and omnipotence of Love, the only name we have for one

passion of many natures. The story, as it reaches us, seems to warrant the adoption of the former theory, in the face of its intrinsic improbability.

Whether she had some motive, such as the discovery of a means towards revenge against Oliver—or, quite as likely, against Lucinda—is another question that must remain unanswered. It is not absolutely necessary to suppose any motive, beyond the desire to lie safely in hiding until she could show herself again in her native place without risk of persecution. But motives may be imagined. Could she have compassed the death of either Lucinda or Oliver, she would by doing so have revenged herself on both. She may have been hatching such schemes, although no light is thrown on them by anything that followed.

Scheme or no, declaration would have served no purpose. John Rackham was under her thumb, of course, but Sir Oliver and Lucinda were, so far, beyond her reach, and free. If it crossed her mind to try her luck with Lucinda, make a clean breast of her old relations with Oliver, and appeal to the kindness of heart of a hated rival for shelter and protection, she may easily have put the idea aside at once as purely fantastic and absurd. Far more likely that she dreamed of, and hoped for, some undefined revenge—some knife or poison still beyond her reach. For she could see, herself unseen, enough of the life at the New Hall to make sure that its master and mistress were on no unloving terms. He that visits the New Hall, now a hundred years have passed, will find the old stable still unchanged, and he will be shown what folk still call *The Witch's Squint*, an opening made slot-wise and aslant in the wall of the stable-loft, where Mrs. Trant had compelled her host, or rather servant, to devise a harbour-

age for her, well out of view of all who came to the stables, and only accessible by a little winding stair, with a locked door at the foot, whereof she got and kept the key. This stable is in part an adaptation of the older building that gave place to the New Hall in the days of Harry the Eighth.

How far this concealment was favoured by a readiness of the young groom to wink at a supposed escapade of Mr. Rackham's we cannot know. But if it were so, such a connivance was no new thing at the Hall since its owner came to manhood—just a part of daily life, and no more. Now, this young man was the only person, Rackham excepted, who came and went at the stables without let or hindrance.

However, after all, the story only needs to know that Susan Trant's presence at the New Hall *did* remain unknown to the household—why trouble to throw light on the why and wherefore of any ascertained fact? Nothing came to light, apparently, until Mrs. Trant, a short while before her death, made a full statement of her own share in the business; one that left her motives in the dark, perhaps, but that fully accounted for the many things that called for explanation.

It is fortunate that this confession of Mrs. Trant's has come down to us, clearly written by Absalom Price, the secretary of Lord Fotheringay, from whose grandson the documents came from which this story has been part piecemealed, part abstracted. No doubt this Price was the boy whom we saw some pages back, charged with the care of Sir Oliver's horse on the day of his duel with Vincent. It is fortunate, because the principal source of our information fails us at this point, the manuscript being abruptly torn across; and, although some portions remain, they

would not alone insure a completion of the narrative. Letters referred to in it are also missing.

But enough would be left, without Susan's confession, to supply material for conjecture. The surviving fragments are full of a story that got about that the ghost of Oliver's mother, the Dowager Lady Raydon, walked on the terrace at the Hall as she had done in her lifetime, identified by her dress and her limp. It was first current among the servants, and then reached the ears of the new Lady Raydon, who, however, earnestly besought all who knew it to keep it from Sir Oliver. It seems to have reached him—it was sure to reach him somehow in the end—through Rachel Anstiss, who took this opportunity to revenge herself on Lucinda for her continued refusal to employ her as tirewoman.

There the tale ends, if it were not for the sequel supplied by Absalom Price's manuscript.

## CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. TRANT seems to have been bedridden when Mr. Absalom Price took down the following deposition, but still in full possession of her faculties. He seems not to have added a word to it beyond his note at the end. In another handwriting the actual date of her death is given, nearly two years later, so that the document has hardly the character of a death-bed confession. But if the truth of her statements had been doubted at the time, surely some word to that effect would not have been wanting.

The MS. begins abruptly, as though in answer to a question:—

“Ne’er a one but myself knows aught about it, Master Price, though a many know what came after. But for all that went before, and made the outcome of it, there’s no soul living can tell you a true word but I. And I’ll tell it, and stop while you write it.

“It was in May-time that year the young Squire came to the Manor House by the sea, and rode over to the May games when I was crowned the Queen. Oh, but he was beautiful to see! They stacked the hay early that year, but before the first cart came to the ingathering, I knew him for the liar that he was, and that all my good days were over. An old story, Master Price!

“But no woman should ever be the worse for him, said Squire Raydon. His tenant Jonas Trant would be the



better for a wife, and if he wanted one of his own choosing, let him look for another landlord. Trant got two hundred pounds from the Squire's mother, to close the bargain. What could I do? I had to wed him, but what was he to me? There was no love thrown away 'twixt me and Jonas Trant.

"But the Squire, though he married before the old Lady Raydon died, would come to Kips Manor still, time and again. And he brought comely company with him, be sure—young wenches in want of a tirewoman. And when my father died, my mother had the keeping of the house, and I was always to come from the farm to prank them up to his liking. But though I might hate him between whiles, he had but to beckon me and say a sweet word or two, and I was all his own again. Oh—ay!—I know 'tis shame to me to tell it, as the world goes. . . .

"Well!—a woman's looks are not for ever, and the time came for the end of it all. But he did me a good turn that year when they were for burning helpless women by the score, for witching sheep and cattle, and what not. For they would have it 'twas I had overlooked neighbour Turle's child, and stricken it with the falling sickness. But Squire Raydon rode in, and had me up behind his saddle, and rode me over to Kips, and he was too strong with the gentry for the townsfolk to dare to say him nay, and they were feared of the butt-end of his riding-whip to boot. But Constance Pratt and Apple Trounce were done to death that day at the stake, in Bury market-place, having confessed on the rack their dealings with the Evil One.

"Of which and suchlike doings I, Master Price, have ever been innocent. For the misleading and deception I put upon John Rackham at Kips Manor to dupe him

into the telling of how Lady Raydon's father came by his death at the hands of her husband—but she was not married then, and was no better than I—this deception, I tell you, had no more to do with the Evil One than with the Pope of Rome, being nothing but a mere side-trick anyone may play off on another, to his confusion or hers, being as may be man or woman.” . . .

What follows is entirely description of the incidents at Kips Manor already known to the reader—of the apprehension of the accused culprit by the constabulary on her way back to Trant's Farm; of her maltreatment during detention, pending the arrival of the magistrates; and of her examination and escape, which has already appeared in the story as narrative to Rackham. This brings us to the point of interest, her arrival at the New Hall. She goes on as though answering a question:

“Why did I come to Croxley? Where else should I go, with all the folk against me crying out to burn the witch!—burn the witch? Of all that had any heart for me at all there was none but was afraid, and the man I was married to turned against me, and would have it I had bewitched him!

“How many folk ever come to know what it feels like to be hunted? 'Tis a knowledge that teaches to seek cover where one may. I had not spent my life in the making of friends, to find one at any pinch. But I knew if I could get here I might find something better than friendship—service. I was hopeful to command the poor old fool, John Rackham, and to make him do my bidding. It was an easy task, as it turned out. But no evil spirits in it, good lack! There was neither God nor Devil in it,

to my thinking, but only Mother Nature, who will have her japes, mark you, and we know it. Shall the trees that hatch out young goslings from their pods meet denial for no better reason than that thou and I have never seen one? As soon say there be no eggs with two yolks, because your hen never laid one, nor mine! 'Tis some such freak, a mere hap, and no reason shown, whereby one may get the knack of ruling another's will, and why I should have chanced to learn it I know not, more than another. But there was no Devil in it; *that* I know!

"Yes—it was an easy task to get Master Rackham again into leading strings. But he never knew, look you, but what all he did was of his own free-will. He sheltered me, at my bidding, in the upper story of his stable, where he was master and none could gainsay him, unless it were Sir Oliver himself. And as for him, why—if he had seen me, he would but have looked the other way, or said some word of jest about Rackham's grey hairs, and how he should patch up for Heaven before it was too late—and he, poor man, with never a choice in the matter! So I was safe sheltered, for a time; and that was all my thought, at first. . . . What!—do you doubt it? . . .

"Well, Master, I am sure I had no other thought. Except you will have it one thinks the thought one puts away. Will you, Master Absalom, be so ready to tell all the thoughts you have forbidden to enter your mind! . . . Not *murder*, I grant you! But a many other thoughts a man may be more shamefast in the telling of. Children are not packed off to bed to keep a tale of murder from their ears. . . .

"I will tell you, then, and make a clean breast. Down at Kips Manor I had no more hatred for Mistress Lucinda Mauleverer, soiled and spoiled and all ashrink from

her fellow-women, than I had for any other of his quarries. She would have her life to go through, as I had mine. But when it came to my Lady Raydon!—to the seeing of my gentleman at her feet! . . . then I grant you I did lean a little off the balance of my mind to think of a pointed knife, swift to her heart—of the drug the gipsies make and sell, that rots slowly through the liver of the strongest—of any vengeance I could compass. For that October was not so chill but they could walk in the Box Walk—so they call it—in the midday warmth. And they would come close to my outlook, so I could hear them plain, at every turn about.

“Now did I tell you this—that when they first returned, what must Sir Oliver do but catch sight of me on this same Box Walk or the terrace beyond, where I had walked out for curiosity, to view what I might of the house before my lady and gentleman should return? He saw me somehow, from the road, and was in a great taking because of the hooded cloak I wore; one of his mother’s, one she gave me. And then says he to her something of a dream of her, or her ghost, going with a limp. I had heard of that before, through the door that night at Kips, but only a very little. Afterwards, John Rackham told me ’twas the Box Walk. And Sir Oliver—so I understood from him—was of the mind that he had seen his mother’s ghost.

“So there it was! I can’t be off a laugh about it now, to think of the fools I made them all. But it served my turn well, for I had very little liking for being in gaol—and what else was it, if I was shut in all day, mewed up in a hayloft above the horses? I had the Box Walk to myself soon enough, for the folk of that household kept clear of a ghost, once seen. And see now!—suppose I

*had* thought to pay off my score against my lady, as many a like score has been paid ere this!—see the chance it gave me. . . . But I would rather she had died, than he.

“It was all as one, in the end. Only mark you this, Master Absalom!—*I* was not answerable for the Squire’s death—none can say it, and tell truth.

“Ay—ay—ay! I’m coming to it. Never fear I shall die and disappoint you and my lady. She did well by me when I came out of hiding, but I never told her I saw her husband fall, nor the share I had in it. I made up a tale and she listened to it with all her ears. And John Rackham, he bore me out. Little choice he had—John Rackham! . . .

“One day they sat just without, where I could hear them plain, on the seat nigh the door to the garden. I was ready to catch every word. And I would have heard it all, but for the noises in the stable-yard, the combing of the horses and their hoof-clack on the cobble-stones, and young Kenneth singing ‘Arthur a’Bradley.’ ’Twas a Sunday morning, warm like a spring day, and there was a many sounds about. But I had a shrewd ear, and caught the most of what they said. First she was telling him about the ghost. They had all seen it, Oliver dearest!—all but herself. There was old Cicely, twice; and now she wouldn’t come to this side of the house; and Awdrey and Maud, and little Nell from the Old Hall, and Rachel Anstiss before she went back . . . well!—she was in a great rage, dearest Oliver . . . and Reverstoke the butler—indeed, all but Rackham and Kenneth; but then they never came hitherward of the garden-door. Now was it not a strange story? All of a tale, and about the same hour—in the very early morning. Except Reverstoke, who saw it coming back from the Thorpe, near on to

midnight. ‘Come, say it was a strange story, Oliver dearest!’

“The Squire made a poor hand of ridiculing my lady’s wonderment; for he had seen the ghost himself. But he could try to make his own seeing of it into so much explanation of the whole. Of course the first one to see it had the tale from him, and the next would follow on with a fancy bred of both, and so on in order, each ghost to match the other. But, said my lady, none had ever known aught of what he saw. To which he answered pish!—one *must* have known it, else how could any have answered for that hooded cloak, and the dot-and-go-one limp?

“But I could hear in the tone of his voice that he but half-believed in himself as he said it. Then, too, he was keen to know a many particulars, as to whether one of them had sight of the ghost’s face, or could hear its step on the gravel, or could say at a guess whether the right or left was the lame leg that made the limp; but all things none who thought the figure a mere phantasy would care to know.

“Then, having proved to his liking that no ghost had appeared at all, and that all had lied severally, though like enough each thought the rest spoke true, he must needs turn up new soil, swearing it was clear it was a trick of some mischievous jade or boy—most like the latter. Let him but lay hands on him, that was all! He would teach him to play ghost! But then and there I lost the hearing of his words, only that he spoke loud and outvoiced my lady, showing an exasperation out of all measure with the cause of it.

“I was beginning to weary of my concealment and to let myself doubt its necessity—saying to myself that now



surely all fear of persecution of the witch was over—when the thing came about I have to tell you of.

“You remember the place where he was found? Yes, the stone fountain in the middle of the Box Walk—at least, it was a fountain once, but now it has no water. That was where I saw him.

“How do I mean—I saw him? Why, ’twas thus. It was the early morning when none was out of bed, as I thought. The sun had not risen, or barely—one-half to be seen at most, red in the ground-mist that goes with rime frost. It was cold—yes! But the air was sweet, and I had waked at cock-crow, for the loud bird was but two yards away from my bed’s head. And when the air is sweet and still, and one looks for the sunbreak any minute, a crisp dawn is nothing to one who has worked on a farm. I was glad to quit the stable-smell, and breathe the scent of the fresh frost—you know it?

“I walked the length of the Box Walk twice, glad to find none afoot so early; for though ’twas sport to see them run from the ghost, there was danger in it . . . why!—I had no mind to be in disgrace for the playing of a trick when I did come out of hiding, as to my thinking I was bound to do in the end. So I was not sorry to be free of them, and wished the cold might keep them all abed yet a little, and was vexed to hear a footstep and a rustle in the hedge at the end of the walk farthest from me as I turned to go back the third time.

“But it was none of the household. It was the Squire himself, dressed as he often would be if he came from his room o’ nights, in a silk dressing-gown with a broidery of jessamine flowers. But he had no warm wrap against the cold, and in my day he had not been one to face needless hardships.

“Then I had to make my choice, whether to try to slip away from him down some side-alley; or to meet him boldly, trusting he would take me for the ghost I had played off so successfully on the silly household. To do so would be daring; but I had run risks with him before, and not done ill. For better or for worse I chose the perilous way, walking straight for him, adding always somewhat to the limp I had brought with me from Bury, that was now greatly on the mend. My heart was in my mouth to know what would come of this.

“As I advanced to him, so he came forward to meet me. And no sooner was I near enough to get a plain sight of his features, than I saw that he was not himself. . . . What do I mean, Master Absalom? Why—thus: . . .

“Have you never chanced to meet, or hear tell of, one who would rise from sleep as though he were truly waking, and then, still sound asleep and dreaming, go forth and wander hither and thither with no form or purpose, seeing with eyes agape without intelligence, choosing his path sure-footed and without danger to himself, so long as he be not roughly waked by a foolish interference? . . . What—a *somnambulist*?—is that the name? I have known such an one to be called a sleep-walker. But whatever be the name, ’tis one thing—and that thing was what I meant when I said but now that I saw that the Squire was no longer himself.

“And now I can see it all again. I see—most strange to say?—that his eyes that meet mine with a vacant glare see not me, or, if they see me, look beyond and heed me not; and yet it is plain he sees, for he steps aside to avoid the low stone parapet—the fending curb—of the fountain basin. I had feared he would stumble over it, and fall.

“Yet he does not fall! He walks clear, as one who sees

and sees plainly, and turns at the angle as though to walk round and about it; then stops. He is in my eyesight's memory still, standing as one who seems perplexed with something he would count, and cannot.

"And will you believe me in this, Master Absalom? As I came nigher, I could hear his speech, for he was speaking. It was gibberish, but I noted every word. Write them plainly for my lady. 'Six—six—six. I counted six—one to each corner. Solid gold—solid gold. A mine of wealth! And John Rackham in the water! Could I tickle him like a trout, I might catch him in the gills.' Yes—gibberish as it was, I mind all that plain, and him a-saying of it, and laughing to himself. But those were the last words—all but—I ever heard from the Squire's lips. . . .

"Well—see what we had been, he and I, in the years long gone! Women *are* so—and you must even be patient, Master Absalom . . .

"But, mind you, this was not the first I ever knew of this disorder of Sir Oliver's. Ask her ladyship what I told her at Kips Manor; it was when she herself had seen something of it, and spoke of it to me. But I could not tell her of all the times I had seen it. Too much would have come to light over that.

"Only, mark you—the most that I had seen in old years fell short of this. To wander out so far from his sleeping-room, all ill-clad and exposed to the cold morning air, unlocking in his sleep—for so he must have done—some securely-closed door! . . . it was outside all I knew of him at his worst. So that, to see him thus, I was as nigh confounded as I might have been had I come fresh to the sight of it. I was afeared—and that's the truth!

"However, I was not too frightened to see one thing

plain; that I could pass him, myself unseen, and get away at my quickest into concealment again. There was no time to lose, for he would be missed, and followed, to a certainty. Now, no path led to the stable-door except the Box Walk itself, unless, indeed I had risked meeting someone coming from the house to search for the wanderer. So I walked straight on.

"Sir Oliver turned from the fountain basin, and walked towards me as I came. I was not very near him yet, but I could see that he seemed laughing to himself, though his eyes had no expression. He stopped, after a few paces.

"You can recollect the place, Master Absalom, to know where and how we stood? . . . Well—what follows befell thus. I walk on, mark you, to pass him by, he being in mid-pathway. Of a sudden I see his face change, as though he waked. His eyes are fixed on mine, and he understands. I, too, understand, and then I see that my only chance is the ghost. So I wrap my hood close in, that he may not see my face, and press straight on. You take the way of it?—how it happened . . . ?

"Then his voice comes in a cry—all his own voice, barring the terror in it—and his words come quick: 'Keep off—keep off—keep off—keep off—keep away!' and then, 'Ah—ha—ah!' a cry with no word in it, only fear! His hands were thrown out forward—to stop me like—as he stepped back quicker and quicker.

"Had I spoke out then and there, in my own voice, I might have saved him. But one is wise when all is over, and time comes for thinking. All my thought was to get by him, and away into hiding.

"He saw me coming, and went back and back. So far only as the parapet. It tripped him, and he fell backward across what there was of water, striking on a

stone edge-up, some leaving of the figure that stood there once—no shape in it! It struck well into his back, below the shoulder.

“That was all I saw. But I heard him cry out: ‘What—what is it all? Lucy, where are you?’ But it was pain, as well as terror, that time.

“I heard them come from the house ever so soon as I could listen through my window slot. I heard them find him, and my lady a-crying out: ‘Oh, my love—my love! They have killed him.’ For she thought him murdered. She was in a great taking. But what rights had she in him that I had not?”

“This foregoing was written by me, Absalom Price, on July 12, 1692, word for word as it came from the lips of the old woman who was called Dame Rackham, who lived with John Rackham, the caretaker of the New Hall at Croxley Thorpe, through all the years in which it stood untenanted, and afterwards by the bounty of Sir Ralph at a cottage at Blean, where the man died a few years since, nigh upon a century old. I have done this at the desire of the Lady Fotheringay, Sir Ralph’s mother, whose first husband, Sir Oliver, I saw twice in my boyhood, now thirty-seven years since, I being then but eleven years of age. This woman Rackham had an ill name, having lived with this man as his wife for two years before the death of her lawful husband, Farmer Trant, of Warplesdon Farm, near Bury. It is not certain that she and Rackham were ever lawfully united, but she passed as his wife. She had the repute of being a witch too, and it was said that she had narrowly escaped the stake. This is confirmed by her own narrative, which also appears to admit the truth of some of the accusations against her.

“Until Mistress Trant made this statement, Sir Oliver Raydon’s death was not connected with his habit of walking in his sleep. He was supposed to have gone out at this early hour of the morning to test the truth of the reports that had got about that his mother’s ghost walked every morning at sunrise in the place where his body was found, just dead. His scanty clothing on so cold a morning was held by some to call this in question; otherwise the thing was not improbable in itself. The cause of his death was always believed to be the same as what the old woman’s story gives us; that is, that he stumbled over the parapet and fell, striking his body on a stone, no great distance from the wound late healed, which broke open internally, injuring some vital part. There was profuse hæmorrhage from the mouth, none from the wound, which was thought by many to account for the suddenness of his death.

“The only person present but myself when Mrs. Trant made this deposition was my wife, whose name is here appended beside my own as a witness to its truth. Her attestation is also to that of the narrative itself in a measure, as she was herself among the first to find the body of Sir Oliver, being in the employment of the family, though a very young girl. She remembers also much of the story told at the time better than I do myself, being over three years my senior.

(Signed) “ABSALOM PRICE.

“ELEANOR PRICE, *wife of the above.*”







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